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In These Times

INDEPENDENT NEWS & VIEWS

June 14, 1998

Candidate Wellstone

Can a Wellstone
presidential
campaign lead
to a Democratic
alternative?

DOUG IRELAND REPORTS

Building a
citizen politics

BY SEN. PAUL WELLSTONE



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**IT SEEMS FOOD IRRADIATION
PROPONENTS COULD USE
SOME EXPOSURE THEMSELVES.**



Filthy, overcrowded processing plants like this are not only inhumane, but a threat to you and your family because of fecal contamination in the meat. Sadly, instead of cleaning up their act, food corporations would rather continue their dangerously unsanitary ways by just irradiating the fecal-contaminated meat – meat that should never have reached your table in the first place. For more on what you can do, write to Food & Water, Walden, VT 05873. It's time we get the food industry to start cleaning up and stop covering up.

FOOD & WATER

The Pentagon Admits the Obvious

In 1959, when Fidel Castro triumphantly entered Havana and announced an end to U.S. domination of his island nation, President Dwight D. Eisenhower worried about the revolutionary government's threat to American overseas investors. With the help of CIA Director Allen Dulles, Eisenhower had succeeded in overthrowing two other left-wing governments, each of which had exercised its sovereign rights to the detriment of international capital. In Iran, in 1953, Prime Minister Mohammed Mossadegh, who had nationalized the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company, was overthrown and murdered. In Guatemala, in 1954, President Jacobo Arbenz Guzman, who had the temerity to nationalize United Fruit Company land was overthrown by a ragtag army organized by Dulles.

Five years later, in a country that had been an adjunct of the United States ever since the end of the Spanish-American war in 1898, Eisenhower faced a new challenge. During the first year of Castro's regime, the new leader came to the United States to ask for aid and sought an audience with its president. Eisenhower refused to meet with the new Cuban leader and aid was denied. After this rebuff, Castro looked elsewhere, and the Soviet Union happily jumped in with a deal to buy Cuban sugar and an offer of a \$100 million in low-interest loans.

This, of course, only increased Eisenhower's hostility. At first, believing that the new regime was weak and could easily be destabilized, he imposed an oil embargo on the island nation. But the Soviet Union countered by rescuing Cuba with massive shipments of oil. That was bad enough, but then Castro nationalized the American-owned electric and telephone companies. This final impertinence convinced Eisenhower direct action was required, so Dulles was given the job of planning an invasion to overthrow the upstart.

When John F. Kennedy took office in 1961, he inherited a thinly disguised CIA operation that came to be known as the Bay of Pigs invasion. It was, of course, a disaster and an embarrassment to the new president, but more importantly, it also inspired a series of developments that have put Cuba and the United States at loggerheads for the past 37 years. First, the failed invasion convinced Castro that the United States would stop at nothing to overthrow him—and, indeed, both President Kennedy and his brother Bobby were obsessed with

this goal. Second, the invasion convinced Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev that the United States would stop at nothing to get rid of Castro. To prevent this, the Soviets placed nuclear missiles in Cuba as a means of deterring another U.S. attack. This, in turn, led to the 1962 missile crisis, which almost escalated into a full-scale nuclear war.

To his credit, Kennedy ended the crisis by pledging, in exchange for the missiles' withdrawal, that the United States would never again invade. But the myth that Cuba represented a military threat to the United States then became credible in the eyes of the American public. Kennedy and his succes-

sors used that myth to justify their continuing attempts to undermine Castro's regime. Indeed, until this day, unprincipled politicians cast Cuba as a threat to American security. In May, the Pentagon finally admitted that Cuba represented no such threat, but that threw House Speaker Newt Gingrich into a rage. Castro, he insisted, was still "a dangerous and unstable tyrant."

The idea that Cuba ever represented a military threat to the United States is absurd. It never had the resources to conduct an offensive war, nor could it survive more than a couple of days if it tried. Nor has Cuba represented a military threat to its Latin American neighbors. Che Guevara's quixotic effort to stir up revolution in Bolivia put that dream to rest more than 30 years ago. The only threat that Cuba poses has been the threat that its revolution would succeed in creating a better society for the majority of its people, and thus become a model for its neighbors to the south and west. Preventing that from happening has been the motivating

force behind U.S. efforts to isolate and destabilize Cuba, as the infamous Helms-Burton Act makes clear.

Worldwide, the U.S. policy of overthrowing revolutionary regimes has been a disaster. In Iran, the overthrow of Mossadegh and his replacement with the shah fostered the rise of Ayatollah Khomeini and religious fanaticism. In Guatemala, the overthrow of Arbenz led to a military dictatorship and more than 30 years of hellish civil war. The same was true in the Congo, where the United States overthrew Patrice Lumumba and the Congolese got Mobutu Sese Seko. Only in Cuba, where Castro has survived 30 years of such attempts has there been stability and a relatively successful society. It's time to let that society evolve in peace. —J.W.

***Cuba has never
represented a
military threat to the
United States. The
real danger, as our
leaders see it, is that
the revolution will
better the lives of
Cubans and set an
example for others.***

In These Times

INDEPENDENT NEWS & VIEWS

"... with liberty and justice for all"

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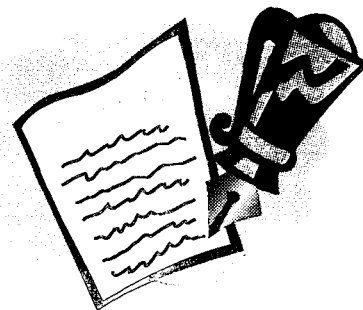
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considerations in his prayers. I pray that he will broadcast them loudly and widely.

Lester Goldstein
Seattle



Uncivil Society

Stephen L. Carter believes that we need to pray in order to restore civility to our society, as Jean Bethke Elshtain notes in her review of Carter's book *Civility* ("A Prayer for Civility," May 3). The nastiness that accompanies the "market values" we seem to have embraced, however, is only one aspect of the market's corrupting influence. A more serious problem is the boundless selfishness advertisers now encourage to promote consumption. "You deserve" to possess their jeans, they assure us, "you should treat yourself" to their futuristic entertainment center, "you should indulge your desires" for their sport utility vehicle. People who indulge such selfish desires are not known for civility.

According to Elshtain, Carter pins his hopes for a revival of civility on "a sense of civic responsibility and preparedness to sacrifice in order to attain a good we cannot know alone"—the essence of why governments are formed. Contrast that idea with the intensity with which many of our leaders denounce taxes—the fuel governments need in order to function. To make taxes seem even more repellent, many politicians find it expedient to vilify government and to encourage privatization, both of which subvert a sense of civic responsibility and a preparedness to sacrifice. In fact, anti-government rhetoric and action only nurture an every-man-for-himself environment.

Let's hope that Carter includes these

Border Dispute

I am writing to express my dismay at Joel Bleifuss' response to letters criticizing his characterization of the Sierra Club initiative on immigration as "reactionary" (Letters, April 19). His two-sentence reply makes it clear that he still refuses even to consider the counter-arguments. If he had bothered to read the initiative, he would have seen that it was neither nativist nor opposed to immigrants. It merely recognized the basic fact that we can't protect our threatened ecosystems without containing population growth.

Bleifuss expects to solve these problems through "international efforts." But these just make it everybody's problem—so that, really, it's nobody's problem. Bleifuss should consider the minuscule amount of progress that came out of the Rio conference on the environment or the Cairo conference on population. As long as population control is mistakenly considered a "global problem," it will indeed be one.

William Fusfield
Pittsburgh

Joel Bleifuss should stick to his guns against the Malthusian "left." The question is not "How many people is enough?" as Don Anderson argues. The real questions are "What slows or stops population growth?" and "Why are people coming to the United States?"

History provides an unambiguous answer to the first question: economic

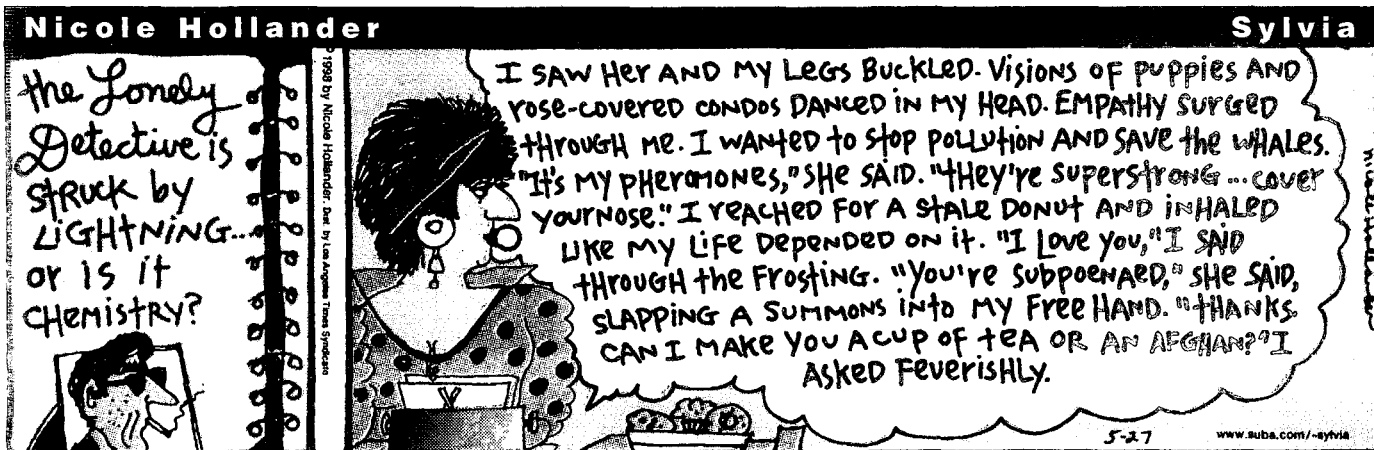
security. Virtually all of the major industrial nations experienced huge population increases during industrialization. Those populations stabilized as the benefits of wealth, nutrition, housing and public health spread broadly through society through high growth rates and redistribution.

As to the second question: The 124 million people who Anderson fears will despoil our natural resources are fleeing U.S.-sponsored economic policies and wars that are ravaging their countries.

Randy Crutcher has the economics of immigration backward. Closing borders will exacerbate, not solve, the global population problem. National borders are increasingly porous to capital. Making them tighter barriers to labor makes it easier for corporations to stimulate bidding wars between national governments over wages, labor relations and—yes, Sierra Club—environmental standards.

If the Sierra Club really wants to keep people from exhausting the landscape that captured John Muir's heart, they should advocate policies that reduce consumption here and increase material well-being in the rest of the world.

John Canham-Clyne
Las Vegas



It's time to go beyond the labels and get...



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David Moberg on the international labor market

Francis Calpotura on community organizing

Joel Rogers on citizen action and social policy

Lisa McGowan on international finance

Katherine Sciacchitano on welfare reform

Robert McChesney on the media

Chris Lehmann on class in America

Dan Cantor on electoral strategies

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...and others to be announced

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denmark

Vacation Consternation

BY DAVID DYSSEGAARD KALLICK

In early May, after a general strike shut down Denmark for 11 days, the government stepped in to end the country's largest labor dispute in a decade.

Labor strife is no trifling matter in a country where more than 80 percent of employees are union members. The strike involved half a million people—nearly one in four Danish workers. During the walkout, gas stations ran dry, supermarket shelves went bare and the public began “hamstering” away essentials.

The central issue in the strike was vacation time. Danish workers have long received five weeks of paid vacation. The unions negotiated a package that raised that to five weeks and a day. Workers rejected the contract and walked out, demanding a full sixth week of vacation.

Have the Danes gone crazy?

It's easy to see why Americans might think so. In the United States, where two weeks is considered a long vacation and three leaves people rolling their eyes, six seems astronomical. By the same token, when U.S. unions feel confident enough to be “demanding” anything, vacation comes after a long list of more pressing concerns: wage increases, job security, child care, better benefits, more flexible hours. These are things the Danes already have.

As in the United States, Danish industry is booming. “We have Europe's strongest economy, with an inflation rate of 7 percent—the lowest in 25 years,” says Åge Iversen, spokesman for the union of unskilled workers, the SiD. The stockmarket is soaring. But unlike the United States, Denmark is having a serious public conversation about how the wealth generated by good times should be divided.

Oddly, neither business nor union leaders were eager to say whether six weeks vacation is too much. Unions

vaguely point to 1997 as a banner year for industry. Corporate leaders talk in equally general terms about remaining globally competitive. “A week's added vacation is equivalent to a 2 percent pay raise,” says Frank Stokholm of *Mandag Morgen*, a weekly report on business and politics. And Denmark is only in the mid-range of European countries on vacation time—not at the top. Germans get a good deal more vacation time than Danes, not to mention the six weeks Finns have had for years.

In the end, the new contract imposed on both sides of the dispute by the Social Democratic administration will give everyone an additional two days of vacation, with three more days for workers with children under 14. In return, employer contributions to pension funds will be reduced, and the government will assume some health-care costs previously covered by employers.

More troublesome than the economics of the strike is the politics. The 60 percent vote against the contract came as a huge shock not only to labor leaders but to journalists, pollsters and politicians of all stripes. A similar shock registered after the 1992 vote on the Maastricht treaty, which politicians supported by overwhelming majorities, but the electorate rejected in a hotly contested referendum. Some see these votes as evidence of an “Americanization” of Danish political life, in which the opinion elite is largely detached from the general public. If so, the general strike may encourage a return to



HENNING BAGGER/AFP PHOTO

Danes on parade.

the political interests of ordinary citizens. “I see the strike as a democratic revitalization of our unions,” Stokholm says, “and a good example of how the Danish population can set an agenda that runs contrary to the projects of the political elite.”

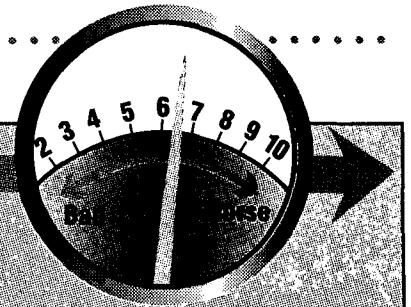
A new test will come May 28, when a referendum on the Amsterdam treaty—a more modest expansion of the European Union—promises a rerun of the Danish battle over Maastricht. Politicians and opinion leaders have lined up in support the treaty, and pollsters again are predicting that the referendum will pass by a narrow margin. ■

David Dyssegaard Kallick is the organizer of “Envisioning a 21st Century Politics,” a Danish/American conference sponsored by the Scandinavian Seminar College and the Washington, D.C.-based Preamble Center.

appall-o-meter

BY DAVID FUTRELLE

The In These Times Index of Indecencies



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Beginners' Lucky Strike 8.8

The *London Observer* recently uncovered one of the more charming tobacco company initiatives: the "learner" cigarette. In the early '70s, according to company documents, RJR Nabisco considered introducing a sort of training cigarette for young "pre-smokers." Since kids just starting to smoke tended to find cigarettes "harsh and irritating," the company thought it might be a good idea to introduce a cig. designed to ease "the beginning smoker" through the "largely physically awkward and unpleasant 'learning to smoke' phase."

Deedle Dumb 6.1

The Disney comedy *Meet the Deedles* went in and out of theaters this spring without making much of a stir. But the kids' movie had a big impact on one irate adult: jazz singer Diane Schuur, who's been known as "Deedles" for years. The singing Deedles has sued Disney for its Deedles. The Associated Press reports, arguing that the movie could very well make the word "Deedles" synonymous with "madcap teen-age lunacy" and "the punch-line to jokes about stupidity." Actually, it sounds like Deedles may accomplish that all by herself.

Get Your Kicks 6.9

When an Orlando, Fla., radio station set up a "Kicks for Guns" swap designed to encourage kids to trade their guns for snazzy athletic shoes, its plans were foiled by some entrepreneurs who set up shop a block away, offering cash instead of shoes. And these gun swappers weren't exactly interested in getting the guns off the street. "This was a pret-

ty relaxed afternoon until we heard people were trying to buy the guns," Orlando Police Chief Will Kennedy explained to Reuters. No arrests were made.

Grouse Zappers 5.1

In Norway, meanwhile, hunters may want to trade their guns in for power lines. According to the Norwegian Institute for Nature Research, "six-times more birds are killed by power cables than by hunters." In a study of one mountainous stretch in southern Norway, nearly 3,000 birds were electrocuted over a five-year period. Only 400 were killed by hunters in the same period. ■

Stunned by a stupid statement?

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Enclose a copy of the appalling item.

left politics

The Alternative Summit

BY DAVID RANNEY

At April's "Presidential Summit of the Americas" in Santiago, Chile, President Clinton assured Latin American leaders that a Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) was all but a reality. But, in fact, the president's failure to secure fast track last fall put the main business of the Santiago summit—hammering out the details of a hemispheric free-trade treaty—on the back burner.

As Clinton and a host of heads of state were hatching plans to bring NAFTA to the rest of the New World, more than 800 activists gathered two blocks away for the "Peoples' Summit of the Americas." Their goal: creating a people's alternative to FTAA.

Organizers began planning for the Peoples' Summit after NAFTA was ratified in 1992, when opponents recognized the need for an alternative form of economic integration. In May 1997, at a meeting in Belo Horizonte, Brazil, leaders of the Inter-American Organization of Workers (ORIT), which represents most major trade union federations in the Hemisphere (including the AFL-CIO), met with the leaders of a number of organizations from the United States, Canada, Mexico, Chile and Brazil to flesh out a plan. The summit was scheduled for the following year.

After three days of meetings and intense debate at the summit, delegates

emerged with a set of concrete policy alternatives, including proposals for foreign investment, international finance, environmental protection, sustainable energy policies, intellectual property and human rights. Delegates hope the meeting will lead to an "alliance to oppose the neoliberal approach to integration and [offer] an alternative based on principles of democracy, equality and social justice." ■

David Ranney is an associate professor of urban planning at the University of Illinois-Chicago. For more information about the Peoples' Summit see <http://members.tripod.com/~redchile>.

food

Cooking with Nuclear Waste

BY LARRY LACK

In April, former Food and Drug Administration Commissioner David Kessler joined the chorus of irradiation cheerleaders, urging consumers to overcome "unfounded fears" about irradiated food. Again, the American public is facing the same question: Are irradiated foods healthy?

Irradiation opponents say no, arguing that some of the chemical compounds created when food is subjected to massive doses of radiation may pose serious health risks. When food is bombarded with gamma rays, new chemical substances called radiolytic products are created. These include benzene, a known carcinogen. One study found that cooked, irradiated beef contained seven-times more benzene than cooked, non-irradiated beef. Some of the other radiolytic products created by irradiation are wholly new chemicals, which never have been identified, let alone tested. In addition, irradiation commonly destroys a significant percentage of the vitamins in food.

So why is irradiation back in the news? Critics charge that the government crusade for irradiation masks an effort to rescue the troubled nuclear industry.

Back in 1967, the FDA deemed food irradiation a health hazard, resisting pressure from the Defense Department and the Atomic Energy Commission (AEC), which were interested in finding commercial uses for nuclear byproducts. In 1980, the International Atomic Energy Association (IAEA), the AEC's international counterpart, promulgated standards for food irradiation and began a campaign to gain worldwide acceptance for the technology.

Concurrently, the AEC and the Department of Energy (DOE) established the Byproducts Utilization Program to promote the commercial use of nuclear waste. The DOE declared that nuclear byproducts "have a wide range of application in food technology, agri-

culture, energy, public health, medicine, and industrial technology." Consequently, the FDA reassessed its policy, reversing its stance in 1986.

But the DOE has acknowledged its ulterior motives for pushing irradiation. In 1983, before a House Armed Services Subcommittee, DOE spokesman F.C. Gilbert testified that "the utilization of these radioactive materials simply reduces our waste handling problem. ... We get some of these very hot elements like cesium and strontium out of the waste." The DOE's goal, he said, was "to transfer federally developed cesium-137 irradiation technology to the commercial sector as rapidly and successfully as possible."

A large-scale expansion of the food irradiation industry could relieve the custodians of radioactive waste of a monstrous headache: cesium-137 accounts for less than 5 percent of nuclear waste stockpiles, but it generates a far higher percentage of the heat and radioactivity that makes these wastes problematic.

Gray Star, Inc., a New Jersey-based food irradiation company is not daunted by the problems. It sees an opportunity to profit from the nation's nuclear waste. In a 1995 letter to Energy Secretary Hazel O'Leary, pioneering nuclear physicist and Gray Star investor Glenn Seaborg, wrote: "[Gray Star's] most conservative market estimates now indicate that they will utilize billions of curies of cesium-137 over the next decade. They are proposing to 'privatize' all the cesium-137 at Hanford and Savannah River as a start. One of the several scenarios is that the government pay them, or their associated manufacturer, an appropriate sum of money to take title to the cesium and remove it from the government sites. The government will significantly reduce costs and at the same time turn a liability into an asset."

As with most waste disposal schemes, private interests will profit, while the public is left with the liability. ■

Larry Lack is a writer in Portland, Ore.



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Media Critic

No News is Bad News

BY DANNY SCHECHTER

The Federal Communication Commission's Mass Media Bureau recently rejected a Denver media watchdog's petition to deny renewal of the licenses of four local TV stations. The Rocky Mountain Media Watch had filed the petition on the grounds that local TV news coverage was poisoning the community's airwaves with violent programming. In newsrooms across America, defenders of freedom of speech praised the decision for taking a stand against censorship.

Since when is freedom of the press only defined as freedom for the press baron? Why is it that giant corporations can systematically debase and devalue journalism and then use the First Amendment as an invisible shield to secure their broadcasting licenses, giving themselves license to do whatever they want at the public's expense?

The TV industry operates in a self-serving cocoon; all criticism or calls for public accountability are routinely ignored, derided and dismissed. When all else fails, critics are bashed as "crusaders for censorship." Unfortunately, old-fashioned liberal reformers join this chorus, rationalizing the FCC's decision as if there were only one issue at stake: the bugaboo of government control. Rushing to the industry's defense, they gang up against the very idea that the FCC has any responsibility to protect the public interest. The last time I looked, that mandate was at the center of its mission. How did we come so far from the consensus that the public owns the airwaves?

Remember: A different standard exists for radio and TV than for newspapers and magazines. Because the radio and TV spectrum is limited, the former are licensed, while the latter are not. Without compromising any principles, the FCC could have used this opportunity in Denver to send a signal to irrespon-

sible broadcasters. But our regulators think they exist to serve the industry they are supposed to be monitoring.

No one, least of all Rocky Mountain Media Watch, wants the government running America's newsrooms. They have said so repeatedly and have tried to offer specific suggestions for positive steps that local stations could reasonably take to improve their coverage. Yet newspaper columnists and TV industry lobbyists have suffered a knee-jerk reaction. "I can't think of anything worse or more horrifying than the idea of asking the FCC to serve as the national nanny on the quality of news," says former FCC General Counsel Henry Geller.

Even more horrifying? On the very day that the FCC bureau denied the petition, the Los Angeles local news interrupted afternoon programming (including children's cartoons) to bring their viewers coverage of a gruesome suicide—live and in color.

The FCC used to mandate public service programming. Many of the best programs were funded only because this rule existed. When the Nixon administration dropped the requirement, resources for such programming faded away. Of course, throughout deregulation the industry mantra remained the same. Repeat after me: "We are only giving the people what they want."

Don't believe me? Tune in and see for yourself. Despite all the new technologies, fancy graphics and Doppler radar, the wasteland has become vaster. In New York, the CBS affiliate boasts of "more news in less time." Los Angeles local news consists of reporting on "Nail Salon Nightmares" and "Mansions Where Disasters Hit!" A Rocky Mountain Media Watch study of 100 stations found that on a given day 20 percent of them carried

no news at all.

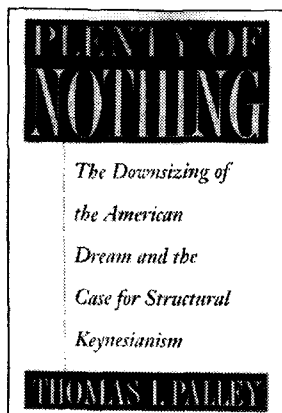
The group's detailed research has been quoted nationwide and verified by major academic studies. But critics such as former NBC News and PBS President Lawrence K. Grossman and media reformers like Tom Rosenstiel of the Project For Excellence in Journalism oppose government intervention. What do they propose? "Educate consumers" and "offer stations incentives, like awards." "It's an uphill battle," Grossman writes in the *Columbia Journalism Review*, but the local news business is going downhill fast, as it sucks up millions in ad dollars with which to persuade Congress and the public that their self-interest is the public interest.

The Rocky Mountain Media Watch is appealing the decision to the full FCC Commission, but don't hold your breath. This is the same FCC that looks the other way as media concentration and monopolies multiply, and the same agency that ignored its own staff's detailed findings of improprieties and irregularities in Rupert Murdoch's bid to become the No. 1 owner of TV stations in America. Let the industry police itself? Sadly, there is no reason to believe that it will. Is there a constitutionally acceptable method for cleaning up the airwaves? There is if we look for it.

The television media has little respect for the values of free speech. There are more channels than choices, more outlets than voices. Unfortunately, "freedom of the press," FCC style, is not free. ■

Danny Schechter, the executive producer of *Globalvision*, is the author of *The More You Watch, The Less You Know* (Seven Stories Press). He is also an advisor to the Rocky Mountain Media Watch.

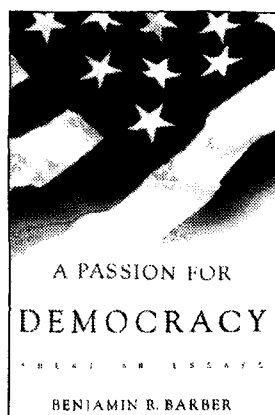
Princeton



Plenty of Nothing

Thomas I. Palley

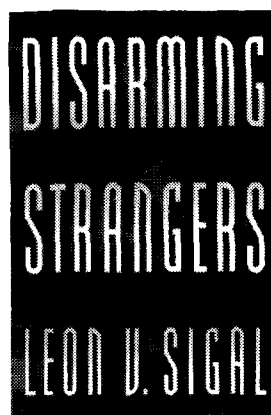
If we are doing so well, many Americans ask, why does it feel like we are working harder for less? Why does the inequality between rich and poor keep growing? In this wide-ranging and provocative book, Thomas Palley proposes a new economic model designed to return America to sustainable, shared prosperity. Cloth \$27.95



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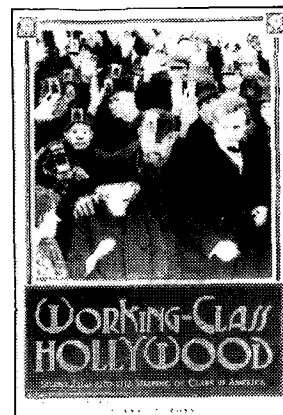
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Bilingualism: Asset or Handicap?

BY REBECA ITZKOWICH

On June 2, California voters will decide whether to scale back state support for bilingual education, and force non-English speaking students into English-only classrooms as quickly as possible. If passed, this initiative, legally known as Proposition 227, is certain to harm the very children it is meant to help.

Proposition 227 reflects a large and powerful segment of American public opinion that is dedicated to subordinating many important aspects of this debate to one dominant premise: In the United States, high academic achievement has always been directly related to proficiency in English. Thus, according to proponents of 227, we must prescribe an academic curriculum that promotes the fastest way of learning English.

Given the alarming nationwide drop-out rate among minority students with limited English skills, it is not surprising that this sledge-hammer argument is receiving considerable support, even within immigrant communities. Many immigrant parents, desperate for their children to succeed, suppress their own heritage and language so that their children will become "better Americans." These well-intentioned people are easily swayed by Proposition 227 and the speed with which it aims to get immigrant children into English-only classrooms.

But are other languages and cultures really barriers—handicaps to be overcome by immigrants who want to learn how to become successful and productive? Absolutely not, says Jim Cummins, professor at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education and an expert in second-language acquisition. On the contrary, for many students a significant predictor of academic success in English is the extent to which the student's first language and culture are incorporated into the school program. "In programs in which students' first-language skills are strongly reinforced," Cummins says, "their success overall appears to reflect both the more solid cognitive and academic foundation developed through intensive first-language instruction and the reinforcement of their cultural identity." In other words, students who learn in their first language develop a stronger academic foundation and feel empowered as minority students.

Many of the teachers and school board members who support Proposition 227 have grown impatient with bilingual programs, saying that children are not learning English fast enough or well enough because too much time is wasted instructing them in their first language. This is a fallacy. English-language skills are not irretrievably damaged as a result of less initial English instruction because there is a considerable transfer of cognitive and academic skills from one language to another. Researchers like Alma Ada at the University of San Francisco have showed

that students who learn to read in Spanish do not need to learn to read all over again when English is introduced. And when it comes to mathematical skills and scientific concepts, the crossover potential is even greater.

Furthermore, academic achievement is not the only issue at stake. It is hard enough for any child to move from the comfort and security of home to the more competitive school environment. But the difficulties intensify when children go to schools where their home language is not spoken. School is a major arena where children make judgments about their own abilities, and many children have a hard time distinguishing between effort and ability. If they feel inadequate, they give up. It is not surprising that many young immigrant students drop out. To counter this trend, schools must stress that learning English will add to their students' skills and identity, not replace them. If this were done, teachers would not be forced into a role where they take away students' first language to assimilate them into the dominant culture.

It also takes time to learn a second language, a fact that many supporters of Proposition 227 have not acknowledged. Ron Unz, the Silicon Valley millionaire who launched the initiative, has argued that one year of intensive English training should be enough for most children to function in the mainstream English classrooms. "It's simple," he told the *New York Times*. "Take little kids. Put them in a classroom and teach them English."

However, the difficulty of second-language acquisition has been documented by pedagogical researchers as a very complex process that develops over a long period of time. Children can acquire basic communication skills quite quickly. But the cognitive language skills (being able to think and reason in a second language) needed for a student to succeed in school are slower to develop. "On average," Cummins says, "it takes approximately five to seven years for language-minority students to approach grade norms in academic aspects of English proficiency." Because these different levels of second-language acquisition are not always clearly distinguished, students who appear fluent in English, but whose academic performance is poor, are frequently misjudged—with terrible consequences. Their low academic performance and test scores are often attributed to personal or cultural deficiencies, and many are pushed into special education classes before dropping out.

Outside of grade school, the ability to function in two languages is a considerable asset. Why, in school, is bilingualism considered a handicap? ■

Rebeca Itzkowich is a second-language-acquisition specialist in Chicago and a Mexican citizen.

Through the Looking Glass

BY ELLEN MILLER

W

elcome to the Wonderland of campaign finance reform. It's a world where self-satisfied incumbent members of Congress jockey to ward off serious reform efforts, like the Kerry-Wellstone Clean Money bill and the McCain-Feingold effort to eliminate soft money. In return, they give us the spectacle of self-styled "reformers" offering new proposals—often cloaked with those oddly seductive words "bipartisan compromise"—that are more about making the existing system worse than better.

Things are not as they seem in the current congressional debate over money and politics. In the real world, only one quarter of a percent of the voting population gives \$200 or more to a federal candidate. Should we allow more private special-interest money to pour into the system? Does giving more influence to a small group of fat cat donors make lawmakers less beholden when it comes time to make decisions? Does more soft money sloshing to places where it is easier to hide make things better? No, of course not. But this is precisely what members of Congress are doing in their looking-glass world. No wonder they're grinning like Cheshire cats.

First, there is conservative Rep. John Doolittle (R-Calif.), who has introduced a "do-little-good" bill (with 69 co-sponsors) that would completely deregulate the campaign finance system, allowing unlimited contributions to candidates and parties. He justifies this outrageous notion by requiring instantaneous disclosure of campaign contributions—a wacky idea that only would allow us to see more quickly how the political system is being bought and controlled by the plutocrats.

Then there is the Bipartisan Campaign Integrity Act, the so-called "Freshman Bill." The fact that Speaker Newt Gingrich has placed this bill at the top of the agenda when the House takes up campaign finance reform in June, should be enough to sound the alarm. Born from the seemingly sincere efforts of freshmen Reps. Asa Hutchinson (R-Ark.) and Tom Allen (D-Maine), the bill has the ostensible merit of targeting soft money donations to federal parties. But look more closely: It also calls for doubling the overall amount that individuals can give to candidates and parties, allowing them to give \$25,000 per year to a candidate or PAC and an additional \$25,000 per year to a party. It also lifts all restrictions on what are known as "coordinated expenditures"—the hard money a party is legally allowed to spend in coordination with a candidate for federal office. Most duplicitous of all, while the Freshman Bill shuts down the

soft money spigot for national parties, it turns the faucet wide-open for the state parties.

There is another House bill, sponsored by Rep. Chris Shays (R-Conn.) and patterned on McCain-Feingold, that valiantly carries the reform flag by closing the soft money loophole and reigning in hidden spending on electioneering through so-called "issue ads." This is a valuable effort and deserves support as a first step toward comprehensive reform. But even if it passed the House, the chance of it becoming law is nearly nonexistent, since Sen. Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.) has vowed that the Senate will pass no reform. More importantly, the bill still would leave candidates dependent on wealthy special interests to finance their campaigns.

Let's break the mirror. Voters suffer with Tweedledum or Tweedledee choices at the voting booth because competition for office is based on how much money you can raise. The amount of cash congressional candidates have on hand as they prepare for November is up 40 percent from the 1996 election cycle, with candidates amassing more than \$330 million thus far. Ever more special favors have been granted to the wealthy interests who dominate the financing of campaigns: Bankers pick the taxpayers' pockets to protect the profits they make on student loans; credit card agencies skew the bankruptcy code to make it easier for them to collect from debtors; alcohol producers rally to block tougher drunk-driving standards; health insurers and HMOs smash attempts to regulate managed care; polluters delay the implementation of tougher air-quality standards and soften the White House position on global warming; big airlines shift ticket taxes onto the backs of frequent travelers and smaller airlines; food producers block efforts to toughen regulatory standards. And so on.

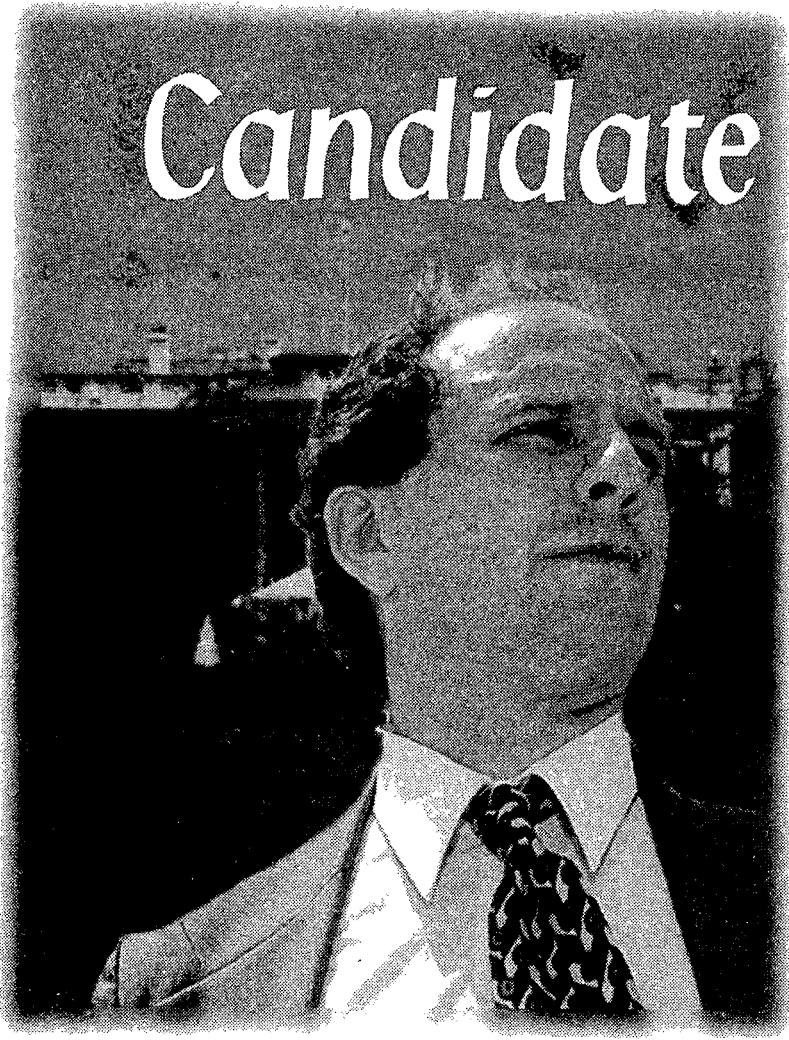
We should not look to Washington for leadership on real reform. Rather, we should take heed of the grass-roots movement gathering steam in the states. As the saying goes, "If the people will lead, the leaders will follow." Clean Money Campaign Reform, a constitutional, public-financing alternative for candidates who voluntarily choose to reject private money-raising and abide by spending limits, is finding its way onto ballots in Missouri, Arizona, Massachusetts and New York City. Voters there, following the lead of Maine and Vermont, which have passed similar reforms, will have a chance to show Washington what campaign finance reform really looks like. Everything else is just a house of cards. ■

Ellen Miller is the executive director of Public Campaign.

Candidate Wellstone

By Doug Ireland

Can a Wellstone presidential campaign lead to a Democratic alternative?



Every four years, the electorally marginalized American left is confronted with the same thorny questions: Does it make sense to actively support an unelectable progressive presidential candidate? Or is such a candidacy merely a well-meaning but futile exercise that drains manpower and meager financial resources from other, more fruitful kinds of organizing? Does such a candidacy augment the left's political appeal, expand its pool of activists and demonstrate its strength? Or is it simply a quadrennial exercise in frustration that leaves voters more cynical and apathetic and the troops exhausted, still bereft of any institutional mechanism for fighting electoral battles and building for the future?

These recurring questions confront the undeclared presidential candidacy of Minnesota Democratic Sen. Paul Wellstone. Wellstone became a hero to left-liberals when, in 1996, he was the only Democratic senator up for re-election who had the guts to vote against the Clinton administration's welfare abolition bill. (Although he's not been above casting a few electorally expedient votes he knew to be wrong: He supported Clinton's anti-terrorism bill, and—despite an otherwise flawless record on gay issues—the gay-bashing Defense of Marriage Act.) Wellstone won re-election handily, surviving a

heavy GOP television blitz with an astute combination of attacks on corporate special interests, down-to-earth talks about bread-and-butter issues and an impressive precinct-level field operation that got out the vote. Wellstone tried to jump-start his candidacy last summer by embarking on a "Poverty Tour"—a conscious imitation of Robert Kennedy's 1967 visit to the nation's poorest regions. Wellstone crisscrossed the country from the Mississippi delta and the mines of Appalachia to the ghettos of Chicago and New York, but garnered little national media attention. Meanwhile, his exploratory visits to Iowa, New Hampshire and other early-voting states—sandwiched in between his senatorial duties—were sharply curtailed by a back injury incurred while wrestling, the 53-year-old's favorite sport.

Now recovered after eight weeks in rehab, Wellstone is back on the campaign trail. He recently announced the establishment of an exploratory committee for his presidential candidacy—a prerequisite under federal law for raising money—and renewed his forays into New Hampshire and Iowa.

Wellstone's chances of stealing the nomination from Vice President Al Gore and the deep-pocketed Clinton apparatus are, of course, exceedingly slim. The senator is little-known

outside his home state, and, in the latest opinion surveys, Gore's favorable ratings top his unfavorables among Democrats by more than 3 to 1. But, if Wellstone runs, he would be an articulate left voice who could crack open the hitherto desultory debate about the country's future. And his closest advisers insist his candidacy has the potential to help launch a new progressive electoral movement.

It will all start in Iowa. What are his chances there? "Wellstone has a geographic advantage here," says the *Des Moines Register's* David Yepsen, Iowa's sharpest political reporter. "Iowa is no different from rural Minnesota, and candidates from neighboring states always do well here. It's easy for him to get here and campaign, and to bring his supporters in here to help get out his vote in the caucuses."

Wellstone's passionate, populist stump speech also goes down well with Iowa Democrats. "They really like what they hear," Yepsen says. "The problem is, they don't really see him as a president."

This is what one East Coast establishment liberal jokingly refers to as Wellstone's "Richard Dreyfuss syndrome": "Paul is a great guy who says all the right things, but there's a lack of *gravitas* in his demeanor that isn't really presidential." When Wellstone gets an audience revved up, the enthusiasm of his listeners feeds his own, and by the end of a speech before a "hot" crowd, Wellstone—his arms flailing, his tie askew, the veins in his wrestler's neck bulging—is often literally jumping up and down as his peroration ends in a sweaty shriek.

While his occasionally over-the-top oratory may not fit the conventional-wisdom definition of "presidential," Wellstone's jubilant passion is that of a great organizer; that's how the ex-college professor and long-time activist first won election, and how he survived the massive Republican left-baiting two years ago. In his 1996 re-election campaign, Wellstone pledged not to run for the Senate again, which means he has nothing to lose. No longer hobbled by the constraints of local electoral calculations, as a presidential candidate the senator would be liberated from the winning-is-everything psychosis of front-runnerdom by the remoteness of an eventual victory.

So, if his candidacy is to be more meaningful than a short-lived raising of the progressive flag (although that alone does have a certain educational value), it needs to translate the evanescent energies aroused by his campaign into ongoing, long-term work—a body capable of supporting primary con-

tests at every level. The insurgent presidential candidacies of the Rev. Jesse Jackson and former California Gov. Jerry Brown both collected national mailing lists of around 300,000 names during their campaigns, but both failed to use the enthusiasm they'd generated to build a lasting vehicle for progressive politics. In his standard stump speech, Wellstone argues for a return to grass-roots politics as an alternative to capital-intensive electronic campaigning, and flails the "hostile takeover" of the Democratic Party by special interests and corporate America.

His analysis cries out for the launching of a permanent fighting organization as a way of strengthening his candidacy and taking it beyond the personal. "That's something I've thought a lot about," says Wellstone of this idea. "The race has to be bigger than one person. You want to make sure that you've pushed politics forward. A lot of liberals, progressives, justice activists—whatever you want to call them—have lost the art of organizing. We have to galvanize people and build for the future."

He thinks it's still too early in his nascent candidacy to go much beyond these generalities, and there's some disagreement among his advisers about whether building a new organization inside the Democratic Party should be an articulated, organic part of the campaign. "A candidacy which would have the greatest potential of success would eventually be about building a movement for change," says Peter Edelman, a former RFK aide who resigned from the Clinton administration over welfare abolition and is one of Wellstone's closest friends and advisers. "If he decides to proceed, the premise is not personal advancement, but rather a movement-oriented organizing approach, one that says: Here's something we can all join together. There are an awful lot of people out there who are unorganized, disaffected and reachable."

Edelman says Wellstone has more to offer than the left-liberal long shots who have preceded him. "Jerry Brown was a loner who never operated in a way that he could even be part of an organization, let alone build one. Jesse functions as a person who says, 'Show me a TV camera and I'll make my case.' Paul reflects a contemporary version of progressive politics—he's not some kind of nostalgia merchant. He is somebody capable of building an organization—he did in Minnesota—and he has the patience, the perseverance and the commitment to stay with something he starts, backed by a 25-year history of organizing."

But for Robert Borosage, another key Wellstone adviser who directs the Washington-based Campaign for America's Future—and who first met Wellstone when he slept on his couch during Jackson's 1988 campaign—talk of building a permanent movement is "utterly unrealistic." "The problem is that the presidential primaries—which is the point at which the

Even if Paul Wellstone couldn't get elected president, as a candidate he would be an articulate left voice who could crack open the desultory debate about his party's future and maybe help launch a new progressive electoral movement.

Building a Citizen Politics

By Sen. Paul D. Wellstone

I want to say something about a conversation I've had with people all across the country. I've been saying, here we are, the United States of America, the richest country in the world at the peak of our economic performance, and there are those—Republicans, and, unfortunately, Democrats—who are saying that we can't provide a good education for all of our children or good health care for all of our citizens. And they're saying that we can't make sure that every child comes to kindergarten ready to learn or that people are able to find good jobs at decent wages.

That is unacceptable. We can do better in our country. People are ready for our nation to do better. These bread-and-butter economic issues, these standard-of-living issues, these, what Jim Hightower calls, "workday-majority" issues, are compelling issues in people's lives.

Everywhere I go, I hear people say, "We are concerned about how to earn a decent living and how to give our children the care we know they need and deserve." If you think about all of the issues that we talk about—from welfare reform and reducing poverty, to stabilizing the middle class and how we perform in an international

economy, to how we can do well in the next century and how we stop the cycle of violence—over and over again, we come back to a focus on a good education, good health care and a good job. Those are issues that are important to the vast majority of people in this country.

My last visit to New Hampshire was inspiring. Wherever I went, there were people in the Democratic Party who were there because they wanted to size everyone up and give everyone a chance. They didn't say, "We're voting for you right now." But they were there to listen and look. They know that it's a living-room politics state and they know you can't just do it with a big bucks TV campaign. To those people, I said with a twinkle in my eye, "It's hard work, but I need to be out here representing the Democratic Wing of the Democratic Party." And people just smiled. They loved it. They understood.

I said in New Hampshire, as I've said in Minnesota and around the country, that I would take a citizen politics over money politics any day. We will build that citizen politics, and that is how we can win elections. It is one thing to focus on these economic issues, which are so important to people's lives, but they just don't hear, they just don't see the convic-

public pays attention—are now front-loaded," Borosage says. "Fifty percent of the delegates are chosen within the first six weeks. What you get with a presidential primary fight is a candidate who inspires and makes your case, and takes a message to millions that is often only heard by hundreds.

"Jackson is notorious for not building anything—he pissed it all away, didn't even save the mailing lists! But there were at least half a dozen winning congressional candidates—from Cynthia McKinney in Georgia to Cleo Fields in Louisiana to Wellstone himself—who were able to use Jesse's campaign as a vehicle to make contacts and challenge the encrusted old guard. The reality is, that's the best you can get out of a presidential campaign. You can galvanize and stimulate, but if you're running for president, you're running for president. Taking your message and trying to pierce the media with it is hard enough to do."

Sam Kaplan, a Minneapolis lawyer who worked on Wellstone's 1990 campaign for the Senate and chaired his run for re-election in 1996, agrees with Borosage. "After Paul's winning 1990 race, we tried to build an ongoing group called the Wellstone Alliance to energize the troops, keep up their enthusiasm, and support other progressive candidates," Kaplan says. "We found that things just weren't that transferable. Putting something like that together is a lot to ask anybody—and it's applying a higher standard to Paul than has

been applied to other progressive candidates."

But, as Dan Cantor, national director of the New Party, remarks with a chuckle, "They just don't elect short, Jewish guys president." "My personal view," he says, "is that if Wellstone runs in a way in which he explicitly says, 'I'm going to do this in a way that builds organizational power'—if that's an explicit part of his campaign—then it becomes very exciting. You can't really say that we need the alternative afterwards: It won't happen."

A similar view comes from the New Mexico Green Party's Cris Moore, a member of the Santa Fe City Council. "I see very little evidence that a lasting organization can come out of a campaign unless you build it during the campaign," he says. "The real question is, when Wellstone loses, does he go out there trying to tell people to vote for Gore after all? If he becomes just another progressive figurehead the way Jesse Jackson has been used, what's the point?"

There's also disagreement about what kind of a movement—if one at all—Wellstone and his supporters should build. Jeff Faux, who heads the Economic Policy Institute and also advises Wellstone, argues that "we need not just a political network—like the Democratic Leadership Council on the right—but a grass-roots base, especially labor." For Faux that means "a broader, class-based politics in a 21st century con-

tion behind it, they just don't know whether it's for real. People don't organize unless there's something to organize for. The question is not to be better at communicating, it's to have an agenda that's worth communicating.

But all our efforts for economic justice, all our efforts to expand opportunities for people in our country, all our efforts to call on people to be their own best selves in America get diluted and diverted by all the ways that money dominates politics. I was in Massachusetts with the "Clean Money, Clean Elections" campaign. They're going to win on that initiative. They won in Maine and Vermont. There's another initiative in New York City, which has great promise, and there are initiatives in Missouri, the state of Washington and Arizona.

There are a whole lot of people who know that we ought to have elections and not auctions. It's an interesting coalition that believes you have to get money out of politics. I've been in people's living rooms where you've got a woman who says, "I'm here because the big corporations dominate politics." And then in the same room, you've got a CEO who says, "I'm here because I'm tired of being shaken down and getting 14 calls a day." This interesting coalition forces progressives to talk to a lot of people with whom we don't necessarily agree and to build coalitions. That's really important.

The policy work and the intellectual work and the ideas that people in Washington work on are important too, but we can't just make the fight in Washington. We have to gal-

vanize people around the country. We have to get people organized, speaking for themselves and advocating for themselves. We have to build that grass-roots politics again.

Pushing this economic agenda and this reform agenda forward is one thing. Beyond that, I'm saying to a lot of people in the country (not necessarily even middle-income people, just American citizens): You know what? You don't like a special-interest politics? You think when it comes to concerns for yourself, your loved ones, your family, your community, that those concerns aren't of concern in Washington? Well, you shouldn't be surprised because, the truth of the matter is, the greatest ally of special-interest politics is not the parties and not Congress—it's when people don't register, don't vote, don't organize and when people don't get involved in public affairs.

You can't check out when it comes to your citizenship. You have to be part of this. You have to speak up. We're going to need you to move our country forward on an agenda of reform, opportunities, education, good jobs, decent wages, health care and building communities—making the United States of America all it can be going into the next century. That's our politics, and we can win on it. ■

Paul D. Wellstone represents Minnesota in the U.S. Senate. This article is adapted from a speech Wellstone gave on April 28 at a forum sponsored by the Congressional Progressive Caucus and the Progressive Challenge, a coalition of public interest groups promoting the "Fairness Agenda."

text. It has to be much more working-class oriented, and much less so on race and gender." In other words, downplay so-called "identity politics."

Borosage disagrees. "The notion that you can enlist people without dealing with their concerns is false," he says. "I remember Jesse telling white Teamsters in Atlanta, 'Your patch isn't big enough. The peace, feminist and gay activists—these are your people!' Dick Gephardt and Al Gore will carry an identity message in the primaries. So you've got to reach out if you want to get off the launching pad." Or, as the civil rights organizer Bayard Rustin used to say, in politics all coalitions are based on mutual self-interest.

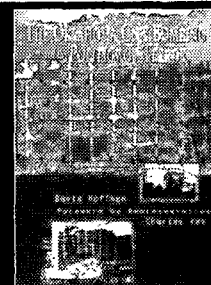
Wellstone won't make a final decision on whether or not to enter the presidential race until just after this fall's midterm congressional elections. Which way it goes will depend in part on Wellstone's personal soundings as he resumes crisscrossing the country and on the response to a planned direct-mail fundraising campaign. "By that time, you still won't have any opinion polls that mean anything," notes one adviser, "so it's a little bit like reading tea leaves."

Or, as Wellstone himself says: "Despite all the science of manipulation in politics, there's still mystery involved. If I can figure out what conversation to have with the American people. ..." He leaves the sentence unfinished. The work that will provide the answer has only just begun. ■

THE OKLAHOMA CITY BOMBING and the POLITICS OF TERROR

by David Hoffman

Foreword by Oklahoma State
Representative Charles Key



Detailed evidence about the U.S. Government's unholy alliance with the terrorist underworld—and of a sting operation that led to the bombing of the Murrah federal building—will no doubt shock many people. But reporter David Hoffman's definitive, two-year investigation leads to many irrefutable revelations.

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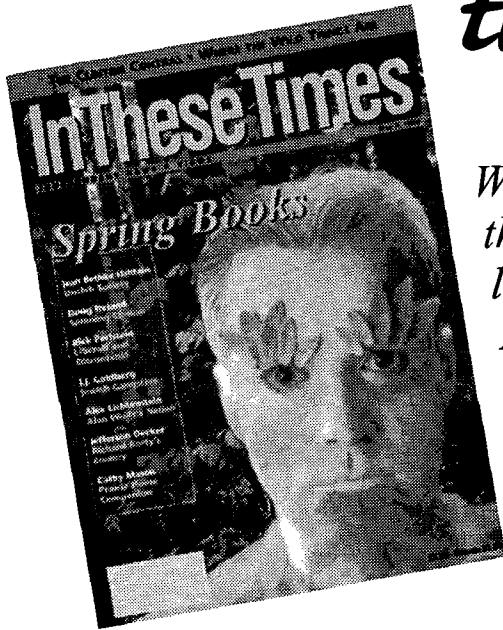
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Was Hillary Right

By Robert Parry

Right-Wing Conspiracies & Hardball Politics

With the Republican House majority at risk, House Speaker Newt Gingrich is abandoning his kinder, gentler persona and is returning to his old partisan self. Gingrich is instructing Republicans to refer to the "Clinton scandals" as "crimes" and to use other buzz words like "stonewall" or "Watergate."

The speaker's tone suggests that special prosecutor Kenneth Starr's impeachment report might not be the dead-on-arrival delivery that some political observers had predicted. The key to Gingrich's strategy, however, will be getting the public to accept that President Clinton is indeed a corrupt politician on par with—or worse than—Richard Nixon.

In its frighteningly glib manner, the Washington news media have already bought into that comparison. The same press corps that quickly grew bored with the complex scandals of the Reagan-Bush era and seems to have forgotten Nixon's deep bag of Watergate-era dirty tricks just can't get enough of Monica and Paula and "the White House in crisis."

Yet, while going wild over every fresh Clinton accusation, the national press corps has given short shrift to recent dramatic disclosures that many of these "scandals" were, in fact, fabricated by well-financed conservative propagandists. Others meanwhile, sprang from opportunists hoping to tap into right-wing slush funds.

In January, when Hillary Clinton responded to the Monica Lewinsky meltdown by blaming a "vast right-wing conspiracy," the Washington Press Corps mocked her as some *X-Files* fantasist. Washington journalists have sniffed, too, at disclosures emanating from the internet magazine *Salon* and elsewhere that trace hundreds of thousands of dollars in conservative money into the pockets of anti-Clinton investigators, operatives and witnesses.

Despite that collective media yawn, the history of Republicans exaggerating Clinton's misdeeds—sexual and otherwise, dates back at least to 1990 when Clinton fought a nasty gubernatorial campaign against Republican Sheffield Nelson. When

Clinton stepped onto the National stage in 1992, many of his Arkansas enemies saw a new chance to hurt their nemesis and cash in with stories, some of which had grains of truth while others were complete fabrications.

In 1992, we now know, Republican moneymen were spreading around cash in hopes of securing some devastating sex stories. "A major contributor to Newt Gingrich's GOPAC ... importuned [me] to follow up on a story in a supermarket tabloid that suggested you [Clinton] had fathered a child with a Little Rock prostitute," wrote journalist David Brock in an "open letter to the president" in the April issue of *Esquire*.

Brock recently confirmed stories by the *New York Observer* and the *Chicago Sun-Times* that the GOPAC donor was Chicago financier Peter W. Smith. According to those accounts, Smith paid Brock \$5,000, gave Arkansas state troopers Roger Perry and Larry Patterson \$6,700 each, and funnelled tens of thousands more to lawyers and PR consultants to market the anti-Clinton stories.

Clinton's electoral victory did not give the Republicans much pause. "Eight months into your presidency, the dirty war was on again," Brock recalled. With Smith again helping to bankroll the operation, Brock soon was transcribing the troopers' salacious—and often improbable—accounts about the sex lives of both Bill and Hillary Clinton.

Those tales, which Brock now suspects were either grossly exaggerated or made up, became the basis for his December 1993 article in *The American Spectator* on Troopergate.

In the article, Brock also mentioned an alleged Clinton encounter with a woman named Paula at a Little Rock hotel in 1991. Weeks later, Paula Jones elbowed her way to national attention at a news conference at the Conservative Political Action Conference, an annual Washington trade show for right-wing entrepreneurs, whose booths were already bristling with Clinton-hating paraphernalia. Jones claimed to have been the "Paula" in question and insisted that Clinton had made a crude sexual advance in the hotel room.

Soon afterwards, Jones filed a lawsuit, but those financing it saw a larger goal in humiliating Clinton. In *Esquire*, Brock noted that "one of Jones' key legal advisers told me that he didn't necessarily believe her story of sexual harassment. ... 'This is about proving Troopergate,' he told me gleefully."

Appearing on CNN's *Crossfire*, Brock acknowledged that Hillary Clinton's charge about a "vast right-wing conspiracy" wasn't far off the mark. "There is a right-wing [apparatus] and I know what it is," Brock said. "I've been there, I was part of it and, yes, they were trying to bring down Bill Clinton by damaging him personally ... by any means necessary."

While the sex stories moved on one track, conservative operatives also churned ahead with tales of Clinton violently abusing power, both in Arkansas and Washington. In 1993-94, a rash of right-wing "investigative" articles appeared in conservative publications, such as the *Washington Times*, *American Spectator*, London *Sunday Telegraph* and *Wall Street Journal*. The stories depicted Arkansas as a dangerous Third World country terrorized by Clinton goons.

In one high-profile story, the *Wall Street Journal*'s editorial page suggested that *New Republic* writer L.J. Davis had been clubbed by Clinton operatives who then stole some of his Whitewater notes. It turned out that Davis had been downing martinis in a hotel bar at the time of the alleged attack and that no notes were missing.

Even more famously, Rush Limbaugh and other conservative voices began promoting suspicions about the suicide of White House Deputy Counsel Vincent Foster. Unsourced allegations claimed that Foster had died elsewhere and was transported to the park. The Foster and other "death squad" charges were summed up in a slick video called *The Clinton Chronicles* produced by a Christian right group, Citizen's for Honest Government, and promoted by the Rev. Jerry Falwell on his *Old Time Gospel Hour* (see "The Clinton Contrasts: Smoke & Mirrors," May 3).

The Foster conspiracists got a boost when two Arkansas troopers of Troopergate fame, Roger Perry and Larry Patterson, asserted that a White House aide named Helen Dickey had called Little Rock in the late afternoon of July 20 with word that Foster had shot himself in the White House parking lot. Since the White House did not officially hear about Foster's death until after 9 p.m., the troopers' claim would mean that details of the death must have been covered up and that the body indeed had been moved.

The troopers' account, however, collapsed when Dickey testified that she did not learn about Foster's death until between 9 and 10 p.m., when she began calling family and friends. Her timing was backed by White House phone records—not to mention the absurdity of the idea that a daylight shooting could occur on White House grounds and not be noticed by thousands of tourists, journalists, bureaucrats and police.

Even Starr, who conducted his own investigation of Foster's death, was forced to accept the overwhelming evidence that Foster had committed suicide at Fort Marcy Park. (Still, Starr took no legal action against the troopers, whose credibility remains important in Starr's expected sex-perjury charges against Clinton.)

But the troopers' phony Foster claim helped unravel another secret about how the Clinton scandals had been knitted together. *Salon* investigative reporter Murray Waas discovered that Citizens for Honest Government "covertly paid more than \$200,000 to individuals who made damaging allegations about President Clinton's personal conduct."

Larry Nichols, the Arkansas representative of Citizens for Honest Government, signed a contract in March 1995 with Perry and Patterson. The two troopers were to make statements challenging the official suicide findings, which they did in their account of the Dickey phone call. Waas says he discovered the contract when Perry began complaining that Nichols hadn't delivered the promised money.

But the Citizens' payoff and the money from GOPAC donor Smith were not the only conservative slush funds sloshing around Arkansas. Right-wing billionaire Richard Mellon Scaife dropped \$1.8 million into another money bucket called the "Arkansas Project." Those funds flowed through the *American Spectator* (see "How Right-wing Crackpot Theories Take Flight," February 22).

According to Waas and Jonathan Broder, some of that money went into the pocket of Starr's chief Whitewater witness, David Hale, the Arkansas judge who testified to Clinton's alleged misdeeds. In *Salon*, Waas and Broder detailed allegations that Hale was receiving cash and other gratuities from a conservative operative, sportsman Parker Dozhier, who was paid \$48,000 by the Arkansas Project.

Salon quoted Dozhier's former live-in girlfriend, Caryn Mann, and her 17-year-old son, Joshua Rand, who described how Dozhier made cash payments of \$500 or less to Hale when the former municipal judge stayed at Dozhier's cabin in Hot Springs, Ark. According to the story, Hale also got free lodging and use of Dozhier's car.

This disclosure created a problem for Starr, a conservative who has also worked closely with groups financed by Scaife. At the end of the Whitewater investigation, Starr had planned to accept a position subsidized by Scaife at Pepperdine University. After the *Salon* article, Starr renounced those appointments but refused to permit a Justice Department review of the Hale allegations.

Despite the payoff charges, Hale remains the linchpin of a second set of allegations in Starr's expected impeachment report. A convicted con man who defrauded the Small Business Administration of \$2 million, Hale is the only living witness to claim first-hand knowledge connecting Clinton to a Whitewater crime. Hale alleges that Clinton pressured him to approve a bogus \$300,000 loan to Susan McDougal, a partner in the Whitewater real estate investment. Clinton denies the charge.

For nearly four years, Starr has sought corroboration of Hale's account. In doing so, the independent counsel applied extraordinary legal pressure on Susan McDougal and her late husband, Jim McDougal, both of whom insisted that Clinton had no involvement in the loan. But that was not an answer Starr would accept.

At the McDougals' fraud trial in 1996, Starr finally got his first piece of corroboration when a Hale business associate,

William Watt, testified that he remembered Hale twice mentioning pressure from Clinton on the McDougal loan. The testimony extricated Watt from potential legal difficulties surrounding his work with Hale.

However, a review of newspaper clips reveals that two years earlier, Watt told *Newsday* that he had never heard Hale mention any pressure from Clinton. "The problem I have with [Hale's] scenario," Watt said, "is that he never once implied to one of us that he was getting pressured."

Nevertheless, Watt's revised recollection proved useful to Starr. The 1996 testimony helped convince a federal jury in Little Rock to convict the McDougals, along with Arkansas Gov. Jim Guy Tucker, giving Starr new leverage. Starr then offered the ailing Jim McDougal leniency if he finally would implicate Clinton. Fearing death in prison, McDougal agreed.

Starr next turned on Susan McDougal, who was paraded around in an orange prison jump suit and shackles. Despite her disgrace, she wouldn't buckle. Indeed, she charged that Starr had put her in a Catch-22. He planned to indict her for perjury if she continued to tell the truth about Clinton's non-involvement. Only by lying and implicating Clinton, she said, could she avoid a perjury charge. So, Susan McDougal refused to testify at all and was jailed 18 months for contempt of court. Jim McDougal got a reduced sentence in exchange for incriminating the president but never the less died in prison last March.

In May, Starr indicted Susan McDougal for criminal contempt again, a charge that could give her another five years in prison. Starr also played hardball with Clinton friend Webster Hubbell, indicting him on tax charges. In reaction, Hubbell claimed that Starr wanted him to perjure himself to implicate Clinton. Starr's prosecutors "can indict my dog, they can indict my cat, but I'm not going to lie about the president," declared Hubbell, who has already served a prison term for cheating his law firm in the '80s.

Congressional Republicans added to Hubbell's discomfort by releasing what they considered incriminating tapes Hubbell had made of private prison conversations with his wife and lawyers. It turned out, however, that the tapes had been edited to delete exculpatory comments about the Clintons and that the transcripts had been altered to add damaging words.

Earlier this year, another long-running Arkansas myth exploded about Clinton's supposed connection to one more high crime: cocaine trafficking at an airport in Mena, Ark. The allegations linking Clinton to Mena rested heavily on the testimony of another infamous Arkansas trooper, L.D. Brown. This time, Brown claimed to have flown CIA-authorized drug flights out of Mena. Brown said he had mentioned the flights to Clinton.

Spurred on by Gingrich, the House Banking Committee conducted a two-year investigation into the allegations but failed to develop any evidence incriminating the president. "We haven't come up with anything to support these allegations concerning then-Governor Clinton," committee spokesman David Runkel says. Still, the committee is moving slowly on a formal report that would clear Clinton, a delay that allows conservatives to continue circulating the charge.

In his reporting, Waas discovered that the Mena allegations were another pricey part of the Arkansas Project. He wrote that private investigator Rex Armistead, who fed Mena information directly to Starr's office and into the Banking Committee, was paid \$250,000 by the Scaife-funded project. According to Waas, Armistead held secret meetings with Starr's deputy, W. Hickman Ewing Jr., with the contents of the discussions sometimes kept out of official files.

The Arkansas Project even tried to dig up dirt on a reporter whose findings undercut the Mena suspicions. After CNN correspondent John Camp challenged Brown's claims, Waas reported, Armistead launched an examination of Camp's personal life, even interviewing Camp's ex-wife.

Many Americans—from the left as well as the right—might feel that Clinton deserves whatever he gets because they disagree with his policies and don't like him personally. But there is a larger issue beyond Clinton: Can we allow well-funded political operatives accountable only to their ideological patrons to gain effective veto power over who governs in Washington simply by virtue of their capacity to defame?

Viewed in its totality, the right's remarkable promotion of the "Clinton scandals"—in league with a conservative special prosecutor and a Republican congressional majority—represents a political watershed: the systematic use of propaganda and disinformation to destabilize a sitting U.S. president. ■

Robert Parry is editor of I.F. Magazine, from which this story is adapted. Subscriptions are available at (800)738-1812.

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Black Lungs

Black kids are
once again
taking up
smoking

By Salim Muwakkil

In 1994, cigarette makers attempted to parlay black youth's fascination with the martyred Malcolm X into big profits. In the wake of Spike Lee's brilliant marketing campaign for his movie *Malcolm X*, T-shirts and baseball caps bearing an "X" logo were omnipresent in the black community. So Star Tobacco Corporation began to manufacture a menthol cigarette called "X." Packaged in the red, black and green colors of the black nationalist movement, the cigarettes were marketed in 20 states before a coalition of outraged African-American community groups successfully forced the manufacturers to discontinue the brand.

Anti-tobacco activists successfully beat back this and a few other clumsy attempts to push nicotine to black teens. But the cigarette industry has had the last laugh. A recently released study by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) found that the consistent decline in smoking once seen among African-American youth has reversed dramatically. While a 1991 poll found that only 12.6 percent of African-American high school students admitted to smoking cigarettes in the past month, that number jumped to 22.7 percent in 1997. That's an 80 percent increase in just six years.

There are several reasons why this has happened. The most obvious is the marketing savvy employed by the tobacco companies, especially when targeting black youth. But the credibility cigarette makers gained by supporting black organizations and the tobacco industry's heavy advertising presence in black publications also has had an impact. And a trend among black youth of mixing tobacco with marijuana has probably worsened the problem. With smoking the leading preventable cause of death in the United States—and with 50,000 African-Americans dying of smoking-related illnesses every year—these new trends are a cause for alarm.

The sharp increase in smoking rates among black teens during the past few years is particularly disturbing because for many years smoking rates among young blacks had been going down—a major victory, since as a whole African-Americans are still more likely to smoke than any ethnic group except Native Americans. "In 1976, there was no difference between blacks and whites," says Michael Ericksen, director of the CDC's office on smoking and health. "Then there was this

huge divergence, and black youth began to view smoking as a 'white thing.' Now it has turned around, and we don't know what happened."

Rep. John Conyers (D-Mich.) thinks he knows: The tobacco industry sped up its efforts to hook young blacks. Last February, he released a list of documents to support his claim. Among them was a 1973 document from the Brown & Williamson Tobacco Corporation showing that the bulk of sales increases in the company's Kool brand was among 16- to 25-year-olds, a demographic that would "soon be three times as important to Kool." A Lorillard Tobacco research study noted that in 1978 the success of its Newport brand was largely due to black high school students.

Although these documents are now two decades old, they help establish the context for what's going on now. As National Medical Association (NMA) president Nathaniel Murdock told the House Subcommittee on Health and the Environment in testimony last March, "Recently released documents related to the deliberate practices to capture African-American smokers do not present the entire picture as to how the tobacco industry promoted and continues to promote nicotine addiction."

The NMA, the country's largest organization of black physicians, and other anti-tobacco groups argue that the industry should be required to fully disclose how it targeted African-Americans. It charges that, among other things, the billboard advertisements currently saturating black communities are specifically aimed at minority youth.

The Summit Health Coalition, a national network of organizations focused on African-American health issues, notes that 20 percent of the advertising budget for Kool cigarettes was dedicated to marketing targeted at African-Americans, although blacks represent just 12 percent of the population. The group charges that young minorities have been targeted more aggressively as general levels of smoking have declined. Murdock suggests that the tobacco industry should be made accountable for the inordinate number of deaths in the African-American community due to smoking. "They should also donate to the traditional black medical schools for further research and prevention of cancer of the lungs and other related diseases," he says.

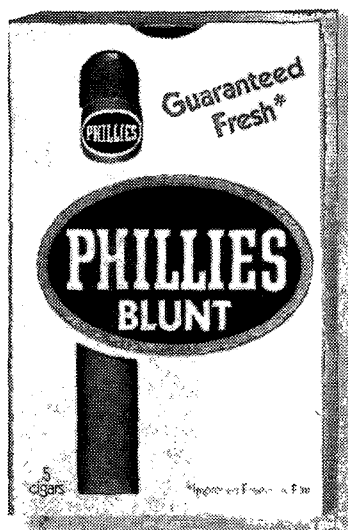
But some anti-smoking activists don't think the tobacco companies are the only people to blame. In fact, some are scathingly critical of major black institutions for their role in pushing—or at least condoning—nicotine addiction. Black newspapers, for example, have had a long, cooperative and profitable relationship with the tobacco industry. Cigarette manufacturers were among the first businesses to advertise in black publications, according to Robert Bogle, publisher of the *Philadelphia Tribune* and former president of the National Newspaper Publishers Association (NNPA), a trade group representing 250 black-owned papers.

When evidence of smoking's health dangers began surfacing, though, black newspapers were conspicuously silent. And as the tobacco industry came under increasing attack by anti-smoking activists, it found a safe haven in many black newspapers. Seldom were anti-smoking articles published in NNPA newspapers. "Tobacco companies were our friends before anybody else was," says Bogle. "A lot of groups have condemned us for taking those ads, but for many of our newspapers it was a matter of economic survival. And as long as it's legal of grow it and smoke it, why should we be left out."

Tobacco ads now represent 60 percent of ad space for most black newspapers, according to current NNPA President Dorothy Leavell. "Tobacco ads influence us," she says. "We've pretty much taken the position that people should have the freedom to make their own decision about whether or not they want to smoke."

The tobacco industry also markets its product by underwriting events in the black community and by helping to sponsor conventions of the major civil rights organizations, including the National Urban League, the NAACP and the Rainbow/PUSH Coalition. The College Fund (formerly the United Negro College Fund) is a recipient of some of the tobacco companies' most generous grants. The Congressional Black Caucus Foundation receives thousands in tobacco cash. Cultural organizations, including the Dance Theater of Harlem and the National Black Arts Festival regularly receive generous donations from the industry. The Kool Jazz Festival, which travels across the country during the summer, is a salient example of tobacco marketers pervasive presence in the black community.

Civil rights groups are attempting to distance themselves from tobacco money, but that's no easy task. In the past, these groups have justified their indulgence by arguing that tobacco companies are attempting to balance the harm they do with the money they give. Few still make that argument. "We're trying to wean ourselves away from this source of revenue," Hugh Price, president of the National Urban League, recently told the Chicago radio station WVON. "And, quite frankly, it's not easy. Without additional sources [of income], we have to scale back on some of our important projects."



Still, tobacco is so ingrained into black life that few African-American leaders express appropriate concern, complains Makani Themba, co-director of the Oakland-based Praxis Project, which targets tobacco marketing. Tobacco companies fund African-American music, art, concerts, schools and churches. They give money to African-American family reunion groups and sponsor family reunion storytelling contests for children. What's perhaps most tragic is that streets in African-American communities are full of larger-than-life images glamorizing these deadly products.

Another part of the problem is black youth smoking marijuana in hollowed-out cigars, or "blunts." The practice is said to have started in Jamaica, where marijuana is routinely mixed with tobacco, and it took hold in New York City in the mid-'80s. Health experts worry that this new trend has provoked a "reverse gateway" effect, bringing marijuana smokers to tobacco rather than vice-versa. Although cigar makers like Havatampa (makers of the popular Phillies Blunts) deny that they intentionally exploit this clandestine trend, critics are not so sure. "I see ads for Phillies Blunts in some stores in Philadelphia that clearly seem to be capitalizing on the kids' blunts craze," says Charyn Sutton, co-founder of the National Association of African-Americans for Positive Imagery.

A few groups of African-Americans are fighting tobacco advertising. Several anti-tobacco groups have started "white out" campaigns, defacing billboards that glamorize smoking. And Conyers is working within the legal system to make black concerns a vital part of tobacco negotiations in Washington. Since we know part of the blame lies squarely at the feet of the tobacco industry, argues Conyers, "there is compelling need for blacks to be included in the settlement talks." The settlement, which is nearly defunct anyway, addresses a variety of issues—including the Food and Drug Administration's authority to regulate tobacco advertising and promotion, and youth access to tobacco products—in exchange for giving the tobacco industry immunity from future lawsuits. But it didn't acknowledge the tobacco industry's special efforts to induce African-Americans to smoke.

It's important for black America's public health that the settlement do so. For instance, industry-paid public service announcements about the dangers of smoking will likely be part of any deal. But most current anti-smoking campaigns don't speak to African-American children's cultural reality. And since the "blunt" trend is in part fueling this new spurt of tobacco use, anti-smoking messages should forthrightly confront the practice.

Pushing nicotine is drug dealing of the most lethal kind. Tobacco is so addictive that it has become deeply insinuated into American culture. But this culturally sanctioned pushing has become too deadly to tolerate, and African-Americans, who have been especially victimized, are finally jumping into the front ranks of the anti-tobacco movement. It's about time. ■

Childhood's End

Child labor indicts the global marketplace

By David Moberg

Over the past decade, the grim reality of child labor has emerged from the shadows of ignorance and indifference. Child laborers span the globe:

Indian rug knotters as young as 5 years old, tied to looms to pay off family debts. Barely pubescent prostitutes, sold into Thai brothels. Pakistani kids, clustered in dark hovels near Sialkot and paid 25 cents to sew soccer balls that Nike and Adidas will later sell for \$50. Young teens in El Salvador, working 12-hour days to make Kathie Lee Gifford garments for Wal-Mart. Even in the United States, children younger than 15 endure growth-stunting work and dangerous pesticides on commercial farms.

At least 250 million children under 15, half of them working full time, hold jobs that undermine their education and threaten their health or development, according to estimates by the International Labor Organization (ILO), the U.N. agency charged with monitoring worker rights. That's roughly one-quarter of all children ages 5 to 15 in the poor developing nations where child labor is most prevalent.

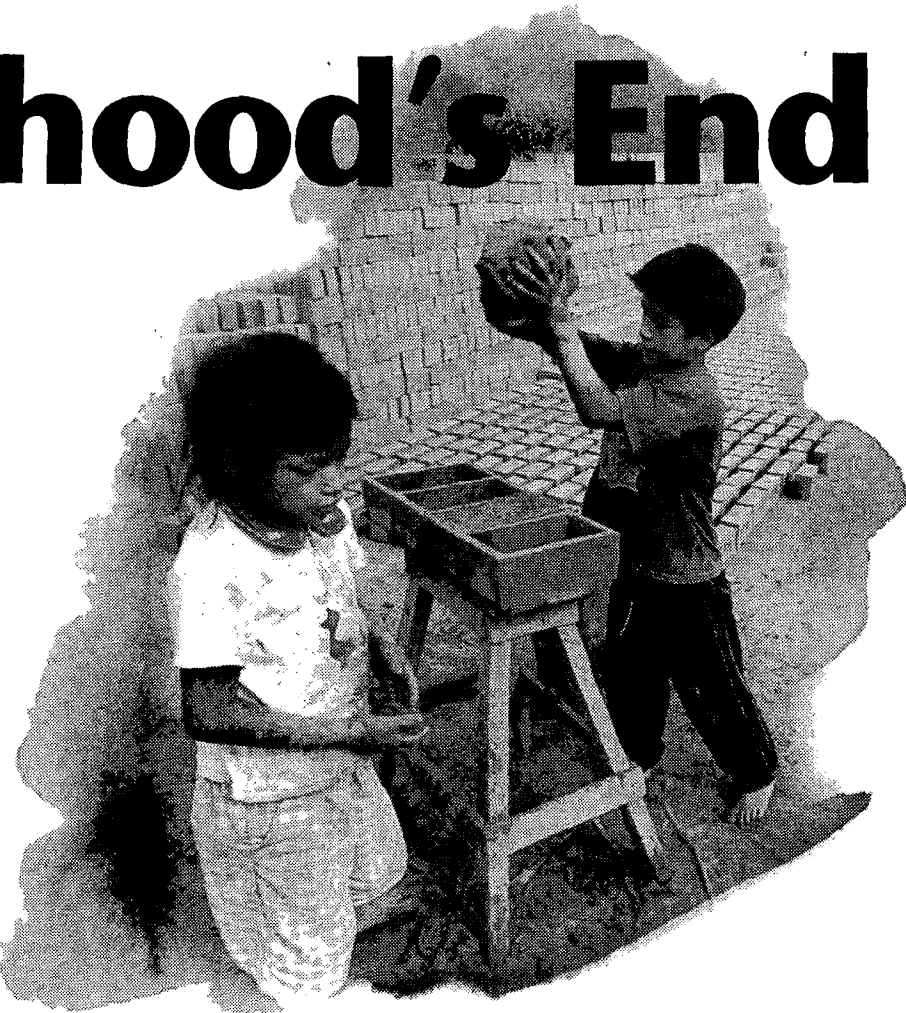
Children work in such businesses partly because their families are desperately poor, but poverty alone does not explain child labor. Children also work because of hostile government policies and simply because employers want them. They're sought not for their "nimble fingers," a 1996 ILO study concluded, but because "children are less aware of their rights, less troublesome and more willing to take orders ... without complaining."

Yet government policy and political will makes a difference, even in poor countries. For example, child labor is widespread in India, but not in the Indian state of Kerala, where leftist gov-

ernments have sought to curb it. In most countries where child labor is prevalent, governments spend too little on basic education and too much on the military and on foreign debt payments. For example, Pakistan spends 6.1 percent of its gross national product on the military and 5.1 percent on servicing foreign debt—but only 2 percent on education.

Although most products of child labor are not traded internationally, the forces unleashed by the new global economy have frequently worsened child labor. International creditors and institutions like the World Bank and International Monetary Fund often force governments to dismantle already flimsy social supports for poor peasants, pushing them and their children out of subsistence agriculture and into urban sweatshops, the street labor market or commercial agriculture. Global corporations and their hard-pressed suppliers also may take advantage of child labor in their endless drive for lower labor costs, particularly through subcontracted work. And national governments that value growth at any price and are guided by radical free-market policies push children into full-time work. Child labor is on the rise in areas where it had once been rare, such as eastern Europe and China, particularly in that country's new export zones.

And while domestic political leaders are the main culprits, the political and financial power of the global marketplace makes child labor an international responsibility. Global awareness and protest are proving a powerful tool for elimi-



nating the worst child labor abuses. This year, for example, a global march against child labor, begun on every continent, will culminate with a rally in Geneva, Switzerland in June, when the ILO will take up a new agreement to target the most intolerable forms of child labor.

And importantly, consumer and labor rights campaigners from rich countries have applied pressure on many fronts, including urging corporations to adopt (and live up to) codes of conduct and establishing programs to monitor work sites and label products. The Rugmark program, for example, provides carpet makers from India and Nepal with a label assuring consumers that the product was made without child labor. A tiny tax on exporters and importers funds both independent monitors of rug looms and schools to bring former child laborers back up to speed. And while a White House task force of business, labor and citizen groups that was set up to eliminate sweatshops in the apparel industry agreed last year on a code of conduct that would have excluded child labor, the agreement has since bogged down in rancorous debate over how to monitor company compliance.

In 1992, Sen. Tom Harkin (D-Iowa) introduced legislation that would have banned products made with child labor from being imported into the United States. Opponents of the measure condemned it as protectionist, even though there aren't a lot of hand-knotted carpets made in the United States to protect. In his State of the Union address earlier this year, Clinton mentioned child labor and promised new legislation—but not support for Harkin's bill. He also asked for a ten-fold increase (to \$30 million this year) for international programs against child labor. But there's a lot more that Clinton—and the leaders of other rich countries—could be doing.

Last fall, when the House leadership was rushing through a bill raising congressional pay, Rep. Bernie Sanders (I-Vt.) adroitly attached an amendment directing the Treasury Department and the Customs Office to enforce a 1930 law banning imports made using forced labor and products made by children working under duress. The International Labor Rights Fund immediately petitioned customs to exclude all South Asian carpets unless importers could prove that they weren't made with child laborers. Similarly, the Teamsters threatened to take action to support Brazilian unions that are trying to keep children from picking oranges, which supply juice for companies like Coca-Cola's Minute Maid brand. So far, the Clinton administration has done nothing to enforce the Sanders amendment. But one official did propose setting up a toll-free telephone number for child laborers in Nepal and Brazil to call in with complaints.

Thanks to Sanders, the United States is also obliged by law to promote labor rights in public institutions like the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank. But so far the administration has failed to do so seriously. The United States and other rich countries could encourage models of development that emphasize education and labor rights. As a condition of bailouts or aid, these international bodies could insist

on enforcement of fundamental workers rights, including elimination of child labor, and transfer of government spending from the military to education. They could also offer debt relief and educational aid as inducements to hard-pressed developing countries to nurture their poor children.

There has long been a worldwide consensus—in theory—against child labor but a crippling lack of will to do anything effective. Most nations have at least implicitly agreed to eliminate child labor. (The United States and Somalia are the only two countries that have not adopted the Special Convention, and the United States has also not ratified the key ILO child labor convention.) This year the ILO is pushing for a new convention targeting the most intolerable child labor—such as child slavery, trafficking in children, sexual exploitation and work that is likely to jeopardize the health, safety and morals of children. By focusing on the worst abuses, the ILO hopes to build consensus and help the most victimized, calculating that less harmful child labor may also be reduced in the process. That will help, but the exploitation of children is linked to the lack of power workers 15 years and older have on the job and in politics throughout the world.

A few people do defend child labor, but most opponents of measures controlling child labor, like those who object to trade

The economic value of products made with child labor is not what's at stake. Rather, it's the fear of legitimizing the link between labor rights and trade—or, equally bad, unmasking the new global economic regime.

sanctions, are actually fighting another battle—preventing trade agreements from containing any provisions for labor rights. “There's real ideological opposition to any social regulation of trade,” says Terry Collingsworth, chief counsel of the International Labor Rights Fund. “There's a fear of the foot-in-the-door phenomenon. If you allow real child-labor legislation, then it's not much of a leap to freedom of association.”

Likewise, the Clinton administration may be delaying enforcement of the ban on products made with forced child labor to avoid an embarrassing challenge from the World Trade Organization. “Peo-

ple know this is a precedent, and they don't want to set it,” says William Goold, a senior advisor to the AFL-CIO on international affairs. “They know if we start enforcing this law, the carpet exporters or somebody else will take us to the World Trade Organization, and then the trade establishment will be really upset. It will be clear that we are setting up trade regimes through the WTO that condone trading in products made by child slaves.”

The economic value of products made with child labor is not what's at stake, says Goold. Rather, it's the fear of legitimizing the link between labor rights and trade—or, equally bad, unmasking the new global economic regime as more interested in preserving free trade than ending child slavery. The stakes in the battle over child labor are big—and not just for the children condemned to work that destroys their lives. ■



Proposition Opposition

**The changing face
of California politics**

By David Bacon

Californians will vote on two divisive initiatives this June—Propositions 226 and 227. The first would force unions to get an authorization from every member, every year, before using dues deductions for lobbying or electoral politics. The second would effectively eliminate bilingual education in public schools. Non-English-speaking children from all grades would be lumped into a one-year class—in English—and then sent into regular English-speaking classes regardless of their language proficiency.

The two initiatives may appear dissimilar, but in recent kickoff rallies in Los Angeles, San Francisco and Oakland, unionists and advocates of immigrant rights shared the platform, linking the two measures. "I don't think we can win either one of these campaigns by itself," says Freddy Tejeda, an organizer for the Northern California Coalition for Immigrant Rights. "Our only hope is to use the strength of each one to reinforce the other."

Both ballot initiatives play on anti-labor sentiment and fear of demographic change among a certain segment of the state's voters. Ever since Gov. Pete Wilson rode to re-election in 1994 on the wave of Proposition 187, which denied undocumented workers and their children publicly funded education and medical care, conservative strategists have sought to capitalize on similar measures. Proposition 187 was followed by Proposition 209, which ended affirmative action in state contracting, employment and university admissions. According to a May 4 poll, Proposition 226 is supported by 55 percent of

voters while Proposition 227 is supported by 69 percent.

Opposition to Proposition 226 comes mostly from union members, while teachers and immigrant rights supporters have been the core of the anti-227 campaign. "The demographics of the state's population are making many of us see a connection," explains Maria Abadesco, who coordinates the Labor-Neighbor campaign for the Alameda County Central Labor Council. "Attacks on immigrants, like 187 and now 227, are increasingly attacks against our own members. And if unions lose their ability to organize political campaigns, which is what 226 would do, it will be much harder to defeat anti-immigrant legislation whether on the ballot or in the legislature."

Forging links between unions and immigrants in California isn't just a tactical move for this one election. It is a logical consequence of a potential shift in voting patterns that could end the era of the right-wing initiatives in California. That possibility is giving seasoned political activists, angry and frustrated by losing Propositions 187 and 209, a new sense of hope. And it has revived a bitter debate over the tactics used in those losing opposition efforts.

Unions, which provided most of the financing for the anti-187 and anti-209 campaigns, are coming to see immigrants as a source of votes. Labor leaders like Miguel Contreras, head of the Los Angeles Labor Federation, and Art Pulaski, who heads the state AFL-CIO, have put together well-funded and organized grass-roots campaigns to get out the labor vote. Using those campaign structures to mobilize a growing base of new

citizen voters could signal a radical shift in the state's politics.

But is a grass-roots campaign enough? University of California-Berkeley journalism professor Lydia Chavez, author of *The Color Bind*, a book that chronicles the anti-209 campaign, says that 209 could have been defeated had it not been for the opposition's internal dissension, failure to use television advertising effectively to reach mainstream voters, and confusion over what public message to stress. "From the very beginning, polling data made it clear that there was only one message that resonated with the general public: Mend it—don't end it," she says. "But the opposition campaign just didn't get it together."

"Mend it—don't end it" refers to the argument that some affirmative action programs do not work well, but that those programs should be changed, rather than eliminating the system of affirmative action as a whole. It is similar to the argument made by some strategists in the campaign against 187—that illegal immigration is a problem, but that the initiative was the wrong way to go about stopping it.

On the other hand, critics accuse both arguments of failing to challenge the racist assumptions underlying each initiative. Illegal immigration and affirmative action are both socially positive, they say, while the initiatives targeted immigrants, minorities and women as scapegoats for social and economic inequality. Susan Alva, an attorney for the Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights in Los Angeles, puts it this way: "You have to tell the truth, even if it's not politically popular or runs against racist stereotypes. When you don't, you lay the basis for further attacks against immigrants and people of color, for the sake of tactical considerations which are really illusions." She says that the tactic of avoiding a debate over the racist assumptions of both 187 and 209 didn't convince voters. At the same time, those victories left a bitter legacy of increased anti-immigrant and anti-minority hysteria.

Chavez disagrees. She praises the grass-roots campaign mounted against Proposition 209 by Californians for Justice, but she maintains that initiatives like 187 and 209 can't be defeated on the ground. A campaign is needed that concentrates on television advertising to reach an audience of mainstream voters, who are generally older and whiter than the population as a whole. "For issues as full of conflict as immigration and affirmative action, even among progressive people, you need a top-down campaign," she says.

Changing demographics may ultimately determine which answer works best. By the first decade of the next century, racial and ethnic minorities will become a majority of the state's population. Already, in the Los Angeles Unified School District, minority children make up the majority of students. New citizen voters are likely to vote in the June election in record numbers. The same demographic trend is underway in other high-population states, such as New York, Illinois, Florida and Texas.

The prospect of immigrants voting clearly makes some people unhappy. In San Francisco in early April, the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) and federal Judge Marilyn Hall Patel told the Northern California Coalition for

Immigrant Rights that it could no longer register voters at ceremonies conducted by the INS. Over the past two years, the coalition has registered thousands of new citizens as voters at events where immigrants are sworn in as citizens.

At the same time, according to a report by the Northern California coalition and the Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights in Los Angeles, the INS currently has a backlog of over 1.7 million people waiting to be naturalized. None of them, of course, can vote until they are sworn in. "We believe the INS is feeling the pressure of Republican politicians," Tejeda says, "who fear immigrants have been motivated to become citizens in order to vote against people like Pete Wilson and propositions like 187 and 227."

Although some estimate that as many as 300,000 to 400,000 new citizens will vote for the first time in the June 2 election, Kenneth Burt, political director of the California Federation of Teachers, cautions that these new voters can't be taken for granted. Recent polls, even among Latinos, still show a large percentage of support for 226 and 227. Consequently, Burt says, some opponents of 187 and 209 view the current campaigns as impossible to win, but nevertheless ones in which an organized group of citizens could be trained for similar battles to come. "While I don't believe in throwing elections away, that core of activists was an important factor in the victory of Gil Cedillo's campaign for State Senate in Los Angeles just a few months ago," he says. "We had the power of labor, the power of immigrants, a few elected officials, and we beat the machine. Eventually, California campaigns will look like what we did there."

In the meantime, Burt says that the campaign against 226 is concentrating on getting out union members, while that against 227 is mobilizing immigrants and Latinos. Both are also reaching out to the larger voting population. "Our challenge is to come out of these campaigns with more activists, and to win at the ballot box at the same time," Burt says. "If we just emphasize television advertising, we won't be any stronger afterward than we are today. And if just concentrate on activists on the ground, we won't reach out far enough, and we'll fail at the polls. We have to do both." ■

David Bacon is a journalist and documentary photographer based in the San Francisco Bay Area.

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Summer Reading

In These Times
editors suggest some
books (and films) to
check out this summer.

James Weinstein

In the past year or so, there's been a small flood of books on the history and state of race relations in America. They cover a lot of ground, past and present, but the two most interesting are concerned with current policy.

Both start out debunking the idea that things haven't changed much since the '60s. In **America in Black and White: One Nation, Indivisible** (Simon & Schuster), Stephan and Abigail Thernstrom claim the high ground of neutrality on the politics of race. They quarrel with many leftists' "it's going-nowhere picture of black America and white racial attitudes," as well as the "see-no-evil view" of the right. They correctly point out that much has changed for the better in the past half-century, but their basic thesis—that this has simply been the result of the natural development of the American economy—is intended to support right-wing policy. Concerted social action by African-Americans and their allies in the struggle for equality, they say, has had little effect. Affirmative action was never really needed, because progress started in the boom decades of World War II and its immediate aftermath. And to prove their point, they use statistics about rising income and assert that by *some* measures "the pace of black progress was more rapid in the '40s and '50s than it has been since."

In the 600 or so statistic-laden pages that follow, the Thernstroms try to buttress their denigration of affirmative

action. Their use of numbers is classically ahistoric and almost idiotic. Look, they say, if poverty causes crime, how does one explain that "homicide rates actually declined during the Great Depression of the '30s" and continued to decline until the '60s? Well, couldn't that low crime rate in the '30s have had something to do with the fact that everyone was poor together, and that African-Americans were still largely isolated in the rural South? Such considerations don't reach the Thernstroms' radar screen. Nor does the reality of today's inner-city poor, who are frustrated day and night by television enticements to possess the latest fashions and by constant reminders of the "good life" that remains beyond their reach.

Orlando Patterson's **The Ordeal of Integration** (Civitas) is another story. Though just 200 pages long, it is filled with so many ideas and insights that it cannot be easily summarized. Reading it is a joy and a constant challenge. Like the Thernstroms, Patterson criticizes those who deny the meaningful changes in American race relations during this past half-century. He readily acknowledges the great achievements of these years but attributes them, in part, "to the success of the government policies now being maligned by the left for not having gone far enough, and by the right for having gone too far."

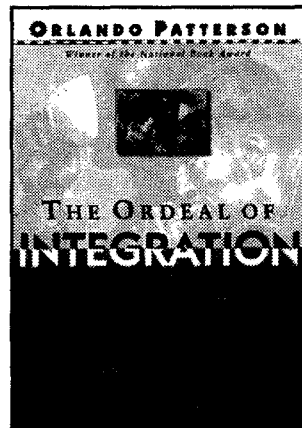
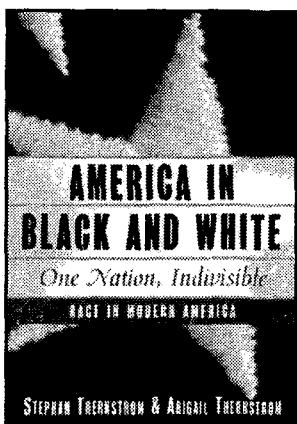
Patterson takes great pride in the achievements and culture of what he calls "America's most American ethnic group," but he is also unsparingly critical of African-Americans' shortcomings. He applauds the successes of affirmative action but concludes that the majority of middle-income blacks no longer need it. To finish the work begun by recent policies, however, he would continue affirmative action for 15 more years, then follow it with a class-based program of across-the-board social support.

While recognition of "race" has been needed to inform policies aimed at alleviating centuries of racial injuries, Patterson argues that the current escalation of "Afro-American identity rhetoric and race-conscious politics not only have negative educational consequences, but

[also] play straight into the hands of the most reactionary political forces in society." Should we be more concerned, he asks, that the income gap between African-Americans and European-Americans has been *reduced* only slightly since 1974, or that the income gap

between workers and CEOs has *increased* by 340 percent? Neglecting the broader inequality, he argues, "not only obscures the real national problem but [also] precludes an understanding of the Afro-American problem."

Three other recent books demonstrate the Thernstroms' superficiality and Pat-



erson's profundity. David K. Shieler's *A Country of Strangers* (Knopf) is a wonderfully descriptive exploration of current attitudes on both sides of the racial divide. Shieler is particularly insightful when exploring the depth of African-Americans' sensitivity to the racial attitudes of whites and the depth of whites' avoidance of their own feelings. Leon F. Litwak's *Trouble in Mind: Black Southerners in the Age of Jim Crow* (Knopf) recounts the half-century of unrelenting oppression and denial of black humanity that Patterson calls the "institutional neoslavery of the post-reconstruction South." This is a stark reminder of how recently African-Americans were treated as less than human, and of the obstacles they have had to overcome to achieve a measure of equality in our society. Finally, there is the long-awaited second volume of Taylor Branch's *America in the King Years* trilogy. The first volume, *Parting the Waters*, was an inspiring 600-page recounting of the origins of the '60s movement that read like a novel. This volume, *Pillar of Fire* (Simon and Schuster), is just as long and covers the events of 1963-65, both in the civil rights camp and the Nation of Islam. Unfortunately, the book is much tougher going than its predecessor, though still an indispensable source of information on these years. ■

Miles Harvey

Ever since Henry David Thoreau walked into the woods, leaving behind "the mud and slush ... that alluvion which covers the globe, through Paris and London, through New York and Boston and Concord," American environmental writers have often ignored—and more often vilified—urban life. "Nature" was always out there somewhere, away from the places where most of us live. But recent years have seen the slow emergence of a new group of writers who believe that urban areas, far from being void of nature, constitute a new kind of wilderness, full of what journalist Robert Sullivan calls "already-explored land that has become, through negligence, through exploitation, and through its own chaotic persistence, explorable again."

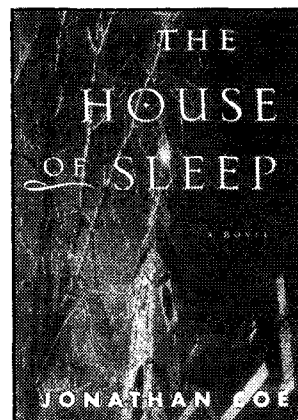
In his delightful book, *The Meadow-*

lands: Wilderness Adventures at the Edge of a City (Scribner), Sullivan writes a love tome about a place that he happily concedes has a reputation for being "one of the most disgusting areas in America." Located just five miles from the Empire State Building, the Meadowlands is a 32-square-mile patch of hard-to-inhabit land—part swamp, part bog, part saltwater marsh. Until recently, it was home to the largest garbage dump in the world, containing everything from toxic waste to murdered mobsters. It's not the kind of spot where you'd normally go for outdoor adventure. But Sullivan—a writer of intrepid curiosity and industrial-strength wit—is not your normal outdoor adventurer.

He had explored the Meadowlands since high school, but it was not until he moved away from the area that Sullivan realized what a "bad habit" the area had become for him. "I would walk into the woods outside of the city where I ended up living and see beautiful trees and huge mountains topped with spectacular glaciers that altogether made me miss the world's greatest industrial swamp," he writes.

Soon, Sullivan found himself taking cross-country trips to Jersey, intent on post-industrial adventure. He canoes through Superfund cleanup sites, hikes along polluted streams with a manic mosquito-eradication expert, and digs around for the body of late Teamster President Jimmy Hoffa, whose final resting place is widely reputed to be in the Meadowlands.

Other than tracking down the last visible remnants of New York's old Penn Station—dumped in the Meadowlands in 1964 to make way for a new station, then forgotten—Sullivan makes few remarkable discoveries. But his hilarious and thoughtful book succeeds in rediscovering both the natural beauty and the environmental devastation of "a place that people rush past on their way to the rest of America."



Another fine recent piece of urban nature writing is Marie Winn's *Red-Tails in Love: A Wildlife Drama in Central Park* (Pantheon Books). When most people think of Central Park's wildlife, they envision the biggest and baddest rodents on the planet. Nonetheless, an astounding 275 species of birds can be spotted in New York's 843-acre enclave. The park is also home to a thriving subculture of eccentric and obsessed birdwatchers, including the author, a gifted journalist who writes a column on the natural world for the *Wall Street Journal*.

In 1992, Winn and her fellow bird lovers watched in shock as a pair of red-tailed hawks inexplicably decided to build a nest atop a high ledge of one of Fifth Avenue's most exclusive apartment houses, right across the street from Woody Allen and Soon-Yi Previn's pad. Such hawks usually make their homes in prairies or woodlands. But, as Winn notes, their decision to live in the Big Apple, "goes beyond the beyond of adaptable. No one had ever heard of a red-tailed hawk nesting on the facade of a city building."

Recounting the birds' five-year stay in New York, Winn weaves together an extraordinary tale of airborne urban pioneering, fraught with unprecedented births, ugly deaths, baffling mysteries and mind-boggling reunions. Winn calls the story a "grand spectacle," and thanks to her first-rate skills as a natural history writer it's no overstatement. Like the cityslicker hawks, Winn's tale topples a lot of assumptions, not the least of which being that you have to leave the city to find the wild. ■

Pat Aufderheide

The summer months bring not only the hope of catching up on reading but also on viewing. For example, the public television series *P.O.V.*, which runs from June to September, lets you sample an entire year's worth of independent, socially and aesthetically daring documentary films.

P.O.V. was launched 10 years ago as a home for hard-hitting, point-of-view (thus the title) docs, in a public TV world that usually avoids anything that might

offend a donor. It has developed into something a little different: a showcase for creative, highly personal video storytelling. Although this intimate approach can sometimes lead to self-indulgence, more often than not this series makes vital connections to important issues and aspects of American culture.

After the season opener, **Baby, It's You** (June 2), a clinic-by-clinic trip through infertility treatments with 40-somethings, comes the ambitious **Tobacco Blues** (June 9). This film is at ground zero of the moral conflicts of modern agriculture. Filmmakers visit four small farms, where tobacco subsidies have made possible better lives—while promoting a death-dealing drug.

In **The Band** (June 16), a Midwestern filmmaker-dad decides to spend a year tracking his teen-aged son's career in a local, and entirely undistinguished, marching band. After initial groans, the kids take him and his camera in. The resulting profile is both

about growing up and about a teen's changing relationship with his dad.

Gay filmmaker Arthur Dong has never forgotten the savage beatings he has taken at the hands of homophobic men. In his **Licensed to Kill** (June 23), he goes into America's prisons to let men convicted of murdering gays explain why they did it. The interviews in this understated film add up to more than the sum of their parts. They put an appallingly human face on hatred.

Kelly Loves Tony (June 30) is the season's best example of nonprofessional video storytellers at work. In a Southeast Asian immigrant community in San Francisco, Kelly is an honors student and Tony is an ex-gang member and ex-con. They're in love, and Kelly's pregnant. Filmmaker Spencer Nakasako gave each a camcorder to record the tumultuous first 18 months of their life together as a family—and then edited the result. It's gritty and semi-articulate, but also touching and sad.

In July and August, *P.O.V.* continues the series with docs such as **Barbie**

Nation (July 14) and **Sacrifice** (July 28), about the sex trade in Thailand from the working girls' point of view. The series winds up in September with a showing of **Family Name**, Macky Alston's video journal of his genealogical search through the South for Alstons both black and white. ■

Jefferson Decker

Anyone interested in the fate of America's cities should take a look at **A Prayer for the City** (Random House), Buzz Bissinger's new book about Philadelphia Mayor Ed Rendell. Bissinger spent four years researching the book, during which time Rendell gave him complete access to his meetings and deliberations. The result is a picture of contemporary urban politics, seen from the inside of City Hall.

Bissinger clearly loves Rendell, and the mayor comes off as charming even at his most impulsive and profane. ("All right," he shouts at one staffer who has been pestering

him about a photo op with Disney characters, "I'll do the fucking mouse.") Rendell, who inherited a structural budget deficit larger than the entire budgets of Houston or Baltimore when he took office in 1992, manages to put the city's books in order, wins a slew of tax breaks for urban redevelopment from the Clinton administration and then cruises to a second term.

With Rendell winning nearly all of his political battles—and at the same time seemingly restoring the city to fiscal health—the book could have been written as a laudatory blueprint for fixing cities. But what really sets this book apart is the way Bissinger captures the ambiguities of Rendell's legacy. Stepping out of the mayor's office long enough to tell the stories of four Philadelphians whose daily struggles—

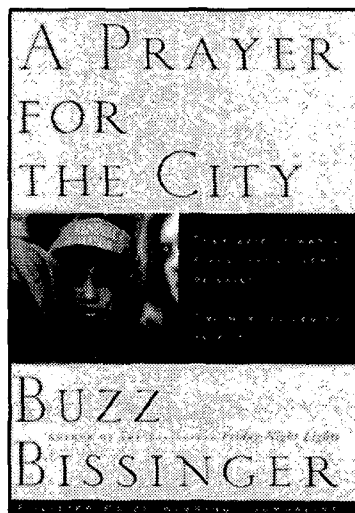
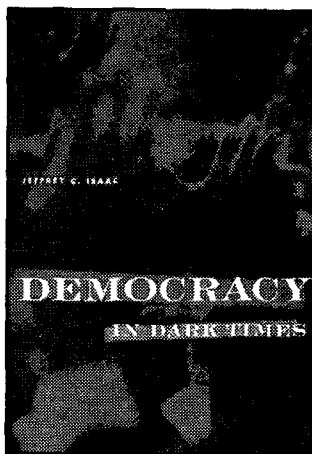
to make ends meet when factories keep closing and to avoid the senseless violence that engulfs their neighborhoods—are largely unchanged by mayoral policy. The book begins and ends with the infrastructure crumbling, the high-wage jobs leaving and residents moving out. Bissinger does not describe a "Philadelphia miracle" but indeed offers a "prayer" for the future of urban areas and the people who are trying desperately to make them work.

Though not exactly beach reading, Jeffrey Isaac's essays, collected in **Democracy in Dark Times** (Cornell University Press), are particularly accessible political theory. Isaac begins by taking his colleagues in the academy to task for falling silent about current political events. (The revolutions of 1989, he points out, have barely registered in the major journals of political philosophy.) Then he fills in some of the gaps in the commentary.

Isaac argues that the years following the fall of communism in Europe have been, paradoxically, some of the worst times for democracy in the West. Noting the level of "dissimulation, deceitfulness, and outright cynicism about the very idea of real suffering and real solidarity" in American culture these days, Isaac wonders if the basic conditions of democratic society might be disappearing. Pessimistic about

attempts to revive the reformist spirit of the beginning of this century and of current attempts to rally a coherent "left" movement around a political campaign or third party, Isaac argues that democracy might still be reinvigorated, bit-by-bit, by "modest" initiatives and informal civic organizations (like

Amnesty International and *Médicins sans Frontières*) that promote dignity and empowerment. Even readers who do not agree with Isaac's assessment will find his cultural criticism challenging. ■



Joel Bleifuss

The best novels not only take you someplace where you haven't been, but where you want to go.

I just discovered Ross MacDonald—I albeit 15 years after his death. In *The Moving Target* (1949), *The Wycherly Woman* (1961) and *The Zebra-Striped Hearse* (1962), all republished this year by Vintage Crime, MacDonald shows his reader the sun, sleaze and sin of California through the jaded eyes of Lew Archer, private investigator and social commentator.

The Zebra-Striped Hearse is a murder story about a particularly dysfunctional family. Colonel Blackwell, a controlling father, hires Archer to dig up dirt on his daughter Harriet's fiancé, a shadowy young artist who Blackwell fears is after her trust fund. Soon, a murder is added to the mystery, then another. The suspense is gripping, but the story is also entertaining as MacDonald, through

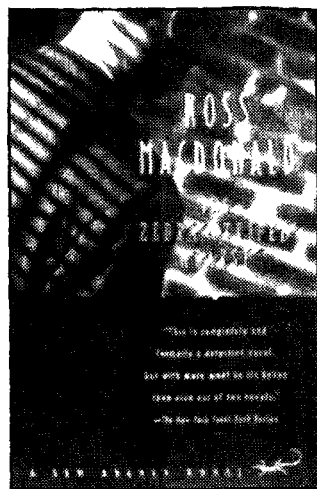
Archer, takes us on a tour of '60s tract houses, the early surfing scene and a Mexican resort filled with American expatriates.

English writer Julian Rathbone sets *Accidents Will Happen* (Serpent's Tail) in a fictionalized Bremen, Germany. We meet police-woman Renata Fechter, who was "promoted" to head the Regional Department for Environmental Crime by her corrupt supervisors as a way to get her out of their hair. Bremen's top eco-cop and a corps of similarly

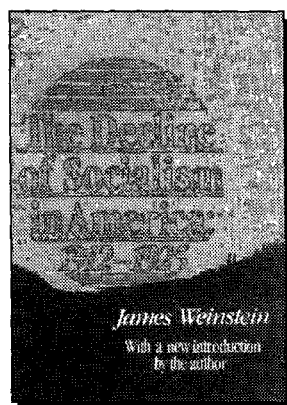
shunted officers—a Turk, a drug addict, a woman whose father was African-American, an old-style cop who got a little too physical with a suspect—are soon on the trail of a murder involving a nuclear accident and an outfit of misfit Brits who peddle toxic waste disposal services.

While Rathbone and MacDonald take you places you haven't been and show you people you wouldn't know, Jonathan Coe's *The House of Sleep* (Knopf) explores the never-foreign mysteries of the mind. Like the early novels of Margaret Drabble and Margaret Atwood, Coe, a 36-year-old Englishman, writes about people one might have known having conversations one might have had—well, almost.

The House of Sleep examines an unrequited love that is born in Ashdown, an old manor house turned university dormitory perched on an English coastline cliff. Robert is infatuated with Sarah, who suffers from hypnagogic hallucinations and narcolepsy. Sarah leaves Gregory, her boyfriend with a sleep fetish, but scorns Robert and hooks up with Veronica instead. Then there is their friend Michael, a film critic who is obsessed with a dead film director and goes without sleep for days on end. Coe weaves together these stories with the characters' interactions 10 years later, when Ashdown House has become a sleeping disorders clinic, and the friends meet up again. ■



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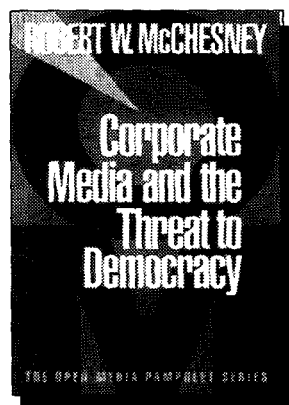
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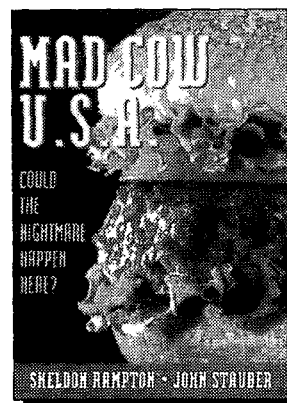
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Reviews

Souls of White Folk

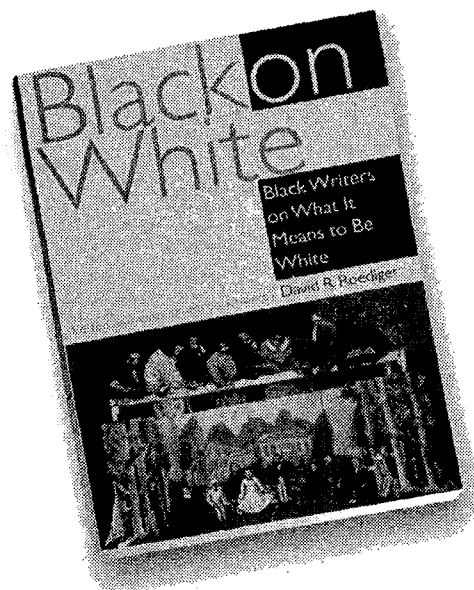
Black on White: Black Writers on What It Means to Be White

Edited by David R. Roediger

Schocken Books

353 pages, \$25.95

REVIEWED BY JAMES NORTH



Labor historian David Roediger is one of the most exciting thinkers of our time. He is one of the leaders in “whiteness” studies, an approach that over the past decade has prompted a major reinterpretation of American history. Roediger and allies such as Noel Ignatiev and Alexander Saxton are intriguing not only because they are re-examining the past, but also because the concept they are elaborating has tremendous practical value—whether the subject of analysis is Elvis Presley and Madonna, rap music’s popularity in white suburbia or the white obsession with black women on welfare.

Roediger is modest about his achievement. He denies that whiteness studies is a recent development, or that it can be credited entirely to white scholars like himself. *Black on White*, a compilation that draws on 40 black writers from Frederick Douglass and Toni Morrison to many obscure figures, ranges across more than 150 years of American history. It is Roediger’s tribute to what he calls “the long, rich, varied, and unsurpassed tradition of Black thought about white people and whiteness.”

One finishes this remarkable anthology with a sense of anger. Throughout American history, whites have endlessly analyzed blacks. Presumptuously, condescendingly, ignorantly and with sometimes blatantly racist motivations, white people have dissected the black family or the black migration north to determine where blacks have “gone

wrong.” One recent low-point was the 1994 publication of *The Bell Curve*, a dishonest, pseudo-scientific tract that purported to demonstrate black intellectual inferiority and nonetheless won respectful consideration in the mainstream American media.

All along, black Americans have been observing and writing about white people, with far more perception and a remarkable degree of compassion. So why isn’t the civil rights leader and sociologist W.E.B. Du Bois a central part of the high school curriculum? Why is the writer James Baldwin fading from view, just 10 years after his death? Why aren’t Toni Morrison’s thoughts on race on *Newsweek*’s cover, instead of *The Bell Curve*?

The concept of whiteness is still being worked out, but so far it is fascinating. In short, as Roediger contends in his 1991 book, *The Wages of Whiteness*, “whiteness” emerged in the 19th century as “a way in which white workers responded to a fear of dependency on wage labor and to the necessities of capitalist work discipline.” White people who had been, say, independent artisans, found themselves forced to submit to the boss in the shop or factory, and they reacted with understandable anxiety and ambivalence. So they began “to construct an image of the Black population as ‘other’—as embodying the preindustrial, erotic, careless style of life the white worker hated and longed

for.” As Roediger puts it in 1994’s *Towards the Abolition of Whiteness*, “All the old habits and styles of life so recently discarded by whites in the process of adopting capitalist values came to be fastened on Blacks.” Nineteenth century white people undergoing the “wrenching adaptation to urban wage labor” flocked to blackface minstrel shows, where they could organize their “longings, fantasies and dreams as projections upon supposedly oversexed, lazy and naive Black characters.”

In this view, “whiteness” is not a positive identity but a kind of mental disease, founded on denying elements of your own character, projecting them onto others, and then reacting to them, sometimes with vicious hatred—although your quarrel is really with yourself. Roediger writes with feeling that whiteness is “the empty and therefore terrifying attempt to build an identity based on what one isn’t and on whom one can hold back.”

This thesis poses a disturbing challenge to the “new labor history” of the past two decades. Recent scholars have pointed out, quite rightly, that organized labor has sometimes been less racist than the larger society, and that the United Mine Workers and the Congress of Industrial Organizations had black members—even black leaders—when the Harvard faculty and the U.S. Congress were still all white. But Roediger argues that labor historians have stressed the elite’s role in promoting racism and division among workers,

without adequately recognizing that whiteness and white supremacy were "creations, in part, of the white working class itself."

This anthology proves that black writers have long understood the ambivalent and volatile concept of whiteness. Some of the most powerful selections deal with lynching in the South in the period between 1890 and 1950. White men continued to initiate sex across the color line, yet whites also joined criminal mobs that murdered some 3,000 black men, often on false rumors of the same acts. (It is interesting to note that the white liberal writers who still worry whether black cultural attitudes formed in the rural South contribute to the problems of the so-called "urban underclass" do not seem as concerned about the cultural heritage of today's white people, some of whose ancestors gathered in vast carnivals to torture and burn other human beings alive.)

Even as the contributors to *Black on White* condemn whiteness, they understand how it damages the people who are imprisoned by it. Du Bois, in a stunning chapter from his 1920 book, *Darkwater*, makes a convincing case that white supremacy contributed to the horror of World War I. He argues that Europe and America, after first arrogantly seizing vast stretches of Africa and Asia, turned the same machine guns on each other. Du Bois notes that as the war continued, "we darker men said: This is not Europe gone mad; this is not aberration nor insanity; this is Europe; this seeming Terrible is the real soul of white culture." Du Bois is persuasive when he says that he feels "a vast pity—pity for a people imprisoned and enthralled, hampered and made miserable for such a ... phantasy!"

The contemporary contributors to *Black on White* prove that the idea of whiteness is just as useful today. Nelson George's essay on Elvis and bell hooks' piece on Madonna prove that these cultural icons are incomprehensible without looking into the complexities of white racial identity. Noting that Madonna wanted to be black as a child, hooks warns us not to romanticize "blackness." "It is a sign of white privilege," she writes, "to be able to 'see' blackness and black culture from a

standpoint where only the rich culture of opposition black people have created in resistance marks and defines us. ... White folks who do not see black pain never really understand the complexity of black pleasure."

Whiteness has a much more tragic and evil outgrowth today: The white obsession with black women on welfare. At first, the preoccupation seems bizarre and irrational. White voters and commentators must be demented to set aside very real issues like health care and labor rights to concentrate on how many children black women whom they will never meet are having. And they get the facts wrong—from the size of the families on welfare to the size of the checks—both of which are considerably smaller than most white people believe.

But the idea of whiteness helps to make some sense out of the obsession. White middle- and working-class people who have their own tangled ambivalence about working in insecure, unrewarding jobs, but who dread falling economically, are more comfortable projecting their anxieties onto others. They derive some grim satisfaction when some of those others are cut from the rolls or forced into punitive workfare jobs.

The study of whiteness should continue to help us interpret America, past and present. It also suggests a political strategy. Some well-meaning people, like Harvard sociologist William Julius Wilson, have argued that progressives should emphasize economic issues to win back white working- and middle-class people, and avoid racially charged questions that might keep them away. But the work of Roediger and his colleagues show that race is too central to be easily disregarded. As Ralph Ellison once asked, "What, by the way, is one to make of a white youngster who, with a transistor radio screaming a Stevie Wonder tune glued to his ear, shouts racial epithets at black youngsters trying to swim at a public beach?" That contradiction is painful, but Stevie offers us some leverage. Any genuine movement for change must confront that kid, politely but firmly. ■

James North lives in New York City and has reported from Africa, Asia and Latin America. He is an American of Swedish, Irish, English and Lithuanian origin.

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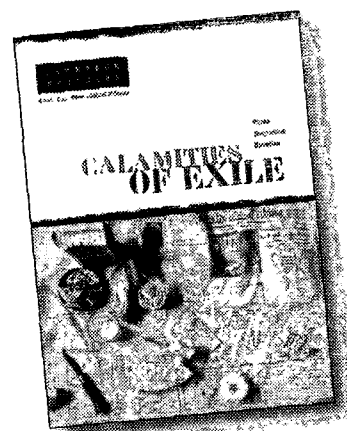
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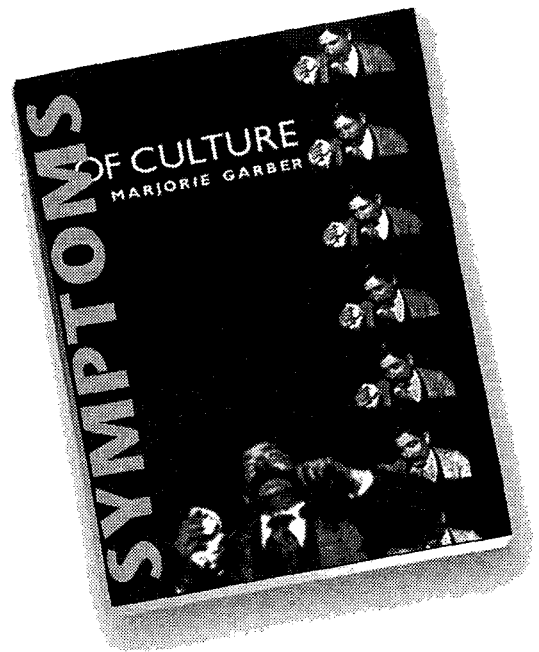
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Symptoms of Criticism

Symptoms of Culture

By Marjorie Garber
Routledge
273 pages, \$25

REVIEWED BY JENNIFER SCHUESSLER



What do faked orgasms have to do with twin beds? The Jell-O box used to convict the Rosenbergs with Madeleine Albright? Our veneration of Shakespeare with the Roman numerals appended to Super Bowls and *Friday the 13th* sequels? As Marjorie Garber—Harvard professor turned popular explicator of cross-dressing, bisexuality and man-dog love—argues in her latest book, they are all “symptoms of culture.”

Just what is a “symptom of culture”? As Garber points out in her introduction, “symptom” has only lately garnered predominantly medical connotations. The word itself comes from Greek roots meaning occurrence, chance or accident—quite literally, “things that fall together.” Garber, however, doesn’t really believe in accidents. From her Freudian perspective, a Jell-O box is not just a Jell-O box, but a coded manifestation of our collectively suppressed desires, fears and fantasies. Much like the sore throats and paralyzed limbs of Freud’s hysterics, the “symptoms of culture” are ways of saying what we cannot, or do not consciously, wish to say.

Although her vocabulary is psychoanalytic, Garber does not propose to “psychoanalyze cultural figures or

‘culture’ itself.” This isn’t to say, however, that the doctor of philosophy—with her elegant, provocative, almost exhaustingly witty bedside manner—doesn’t aim to effect some kind of cure. Garber thinks that we are suffering an epidemic of literalism, empiricism and imaginative impoverishment—an illness that can be addressed most effectively by “reading strategies that are perhaps most fully developed in the field of literary studies.”

Her particular strategy is borrowed from the Freud of *The Interpretation of Dreams*, who held that dreams were puzzles constructed of seemingly banal and nonsensical images drawn from everyday life standing in the place of psychic material that is too hot to handle directly. In Garber’s twist, what is repressed or forgotten in the field of culture—and what, as a result, always returns to haunt us—is context. She attempts to chart the itinerary of cultural commonplaces into “diverse and often bafflingly inappropriate contexts,” their constant migration across “the boundaries of so-called reality and so-called fantasy.”

The first half of the collection will be relatively easy-going for “the common reader of everyday life” that Garber identifies as her audience. Subtitled

“American Dreams,” this sequence of five linked essays takes us through an idiosyncratic, but easily recognized, collection of media images from recent decades. It’s not so much a canonical Hall of Fame as an amusing guided tour through a cabinet of highly suggestive curiosities, a self-consciously trivialized version of the “great conversation” model of reading the classics that she so expertly demolishes in her opening chapter. That essay takes us from Mortimer Adler’s “Great Books” curriculum—whose lack of critical apparatus strikes Garber as ideologically sinister—through *Charlotte’s Web* to former Yale President and Baseball Commissioner A. Bartlett Giamatti’s ponderous writings on baseball with scarcely a bump in the ride. “Two-Point Conversion,” a chapter about the nexus of professional sports, evangelicalism and the patriotic fantasies of a “Christian nation”—whose symptom is the Promise Keepers rallies—leads into “Gentility,” an untangling of postwar anxieties about Jewish “passing” that were reactivated last year by revelations of Madeleine Albright’s ancestry.

In a chapter called “Cinema Scopes,” Garber examines the “evolution of ‘evolution’” from a dangerously left-wing idea that undermined traditional beliefs

to a powerfully conservative tool in the hands of sociobiologists, evolutionary psychologists and other latter-day Social Darwinists. Then, in perhaps her cleverest chapter, she unpacks the Jell-O box that Julius Rosenberg allegedly cut in half to use as a password and takes a closer look at what she calls, in a typically pun-drunk moment, "America's just dessert." General Foods spokesman Jack Benny (born Benny Kubelsky), the "hidden marketing anxieties" of post-war corporate America, rabbinical disputes about the kosher status of gelatin, and the koshering of "kosher" itself as all-American slang are all suspended like so much fruit cocktail in the mysterious, quavering dessert that "both marked and crossed the borderline between Jewish and Christian, American and foreign, kosher and traif."

The second half of the collection, "Classic Signs," tunnels more deeply into specialized academic controversies, particularly in Renaissance studies. But certain preoccupations persist. Primary among them is the empty talk of "greatness" that dogs our national discourse like a nervous cough. While Garber concedes that the category has its (unspecified) uses, she's delightfully withering on the ideological ways that "greatness" is thrust upon us by politicians, cultural conservatives—even nostalgic poststructuralist critics. "We live in a desperate cult of greatness," she writes, "in which even olives are 'Colossal.'"

For Garber, who wrote two books on Shakespeare before crossing over into cultural studies, the *locus classicus* of this anxious hero worship is the elusive Bard himself, "that dream-space of nostalgia for the aging undergraduate ... the fantasy of originary cultural wholeness, the last vestige of universalism." Shakespeare, she argues, has replaced the Bible as our primary source of disembodied (and often mangled) pieties. When would-be Senecas on Capitol Hill semi-knowingly quote the "wisdom" of Iago, they are really just speaking a gassy demotic called "Shakespeare"—"decontextualized, timeless, transcendent, empty, the literary equivalent of waving the American flag." The Roman numerals affixed to the names of world

Wars, Wrestlemanias and WASP heirs are vehicles of this same peculiar effect, "self-referential indices of their own defunct and therefore unassailable greatness."

Garber's essays have the virtue of being both amused and amusing, self-deprecating and scathing in the face of pomposity, pleasingly fannish about the more absurd artifacts of culture and appropriately disturbed by the Promise Keepers and other menaces to liberal society. But there is a nagging problem with the critical method that

Garber is delightfully withering on the ideological ways that "greatness" is thrust upon us by politicians, cultural conservatives—even nostalgic poststructuralist critics.

yokes the essays together to make a book, and that justifies the often bizarre chains of association within them. Saying that culture exhibits "symptoms" in the Freudian sense is to suggest that culture itself has an unconscious, a coherent repository of suppressed impulses that is committing all these slips. But just how does this implied unconsciousness work? When is it "awake," going about its conscious business, and when is it asleep, rearranging images from its conscious life into dreams?

Asking such questions, especially after Garber's diagnosis of the American fear of metaphor, is to risk being labeled a literalist hall-monitor bent on breaking up the book's *jeu d'esprit*. In her introduction, Garber immunizes herself against charges of arbitrariness

and artificiality by invoking "overdetermination," the phenomenon by which many—almost too many—speculative paths converge on the same point of meaning. She quotes Freud's defense of one of his own dream interpretations: "If these chains of thought had been absent others would no doubt have been selected. It is easy enough to construct such chains, as is shown by the puns and riddles that people make everyday for their entertainment."

But in the punning essays that Garber has constructed for more than our amusement, it is she who at times seems overly determined. Take, for example, her hilarious essay on misquotation of Shakespeare in the Clarence Thomas hearings and in Oliver Stone's *JFK*. Garber recalls one J.C. Alvarez, a former Thomas employee who fell back on *Julius Caesar*—"Et tu, Brutus? You too, Anita?"—to damn Hill as an over-ambitious backstabber. "Can it be a total accident," Garber asks, "that her cryptic initials, J.C., are the initials of the Shakespearean figure she is quoting?" Sure, Common Reader answers, why not? If Alvarez's initials had been E.T., her testimony would have been just as striking, but Garber would have to take a far more circuitous route to the desired meaning. Similarly, when Garber calls the Jell-O box "the perfect sign for the politics of the Rosenberg case," she really means perfect for a certain kind of reader of the sign. If the box had said Cheerios, the Rosenbergs still would have gone to the chair, but they might not have figured in this book.

The problem with such moments is the clear implication, despite Garber's disclaimers, that such coincidences are mental byproducts of some mysterious being called "culture," and not just handy props for her own often dazzling performance, excuses she gives herself to change the subject in interesting ways. The "accidental" elements in her puzzles don't always just happen to "fall together," but rather are brought together by her free association. Just who, one begins to wonder, is having these dreams—the culture or the critic? ■

Jennifer Schuessler is on the staff of The New York Review of Books.

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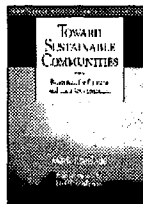


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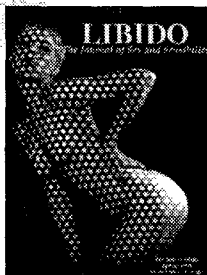


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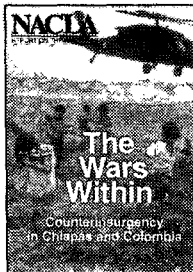
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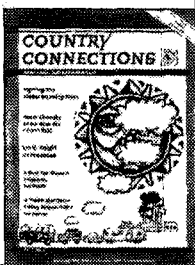


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prisoners can camp out in front, and at the same time discourage them from reading, even to the point of denying me enough light. But that contrast points to one of the major problems in the management of American prisons.

In 18 years of incarceration, I've never seen a prison dayroom that didn't have a television. Inmates in Wisconsin, like most states, are also allowed to have their own TVs. In fact, having your own TV is not just permitted, it's encouraged. A few years ago at the Green Bay Correctional Institution, prison administrators purchased dozens of black-and-white televisions. Prisoners who can't buy their own TVs can borrow the state-owned sets at no cost.

Prisons tend to be located in isolated, rural areas where TV reception would be poor to non-existent if prisoners had to rely on small, rabbit-ear antennas. But in Wisconsin, all maximum- and medium-security prisons have been wired—at great expense to the state—with a cable system connecting every cell to a central antenna on the roof of a prison building.

Not surprisingly, just as I've never seen a dayroom without a television, I've never seen a dayroom TV without an audience. Prison inmates are uniquely situated to become hardcore television addicts. They spend most of their time locked in a room, whether a small cell or a building-size room like the barracks where I live. They're not free to take a walk in the park or do one of the million other things that distract free people from television. Inmates are deprived of family and friends, and they're unable to attend parties or weddings. Plus, imprisonment necessarily separates people from their former occupations, hobbies and interests. The state empties a prisoner's life and offers television to fill the void.

Most prisoners live in what I like to call the "TV universe." Because they watch so much television, inmates know everything that is on. Ask about any televised sporting event or any trivial item from the plot of a sitcom, and prisoners will know it. The converse is also true. Inmates, isolated from society, tend to receive information only from television. If something is not on television, as far as most prisoners know, it doesn't exist.

The complete control that prison authorities exercise over inmates' lives could be used for other purposes, of course. There's no law saying that prisoners must spend their time watching television. But correctional administrators are far less eager to facilitate reading.

I began my prison sentence at the Wapun facility in June 1980. Two months later, the librarian at that prison left to take another job. Wapun's warden decided to close the library until a new librarian could be hired. It remained shuttered for three years. Department of Corrections officials waited two years to hire a librarian, and the new librarian waited until August 1983 before opening the library's doors.

And when a prison library is operational, inmates tend to have a difficult time using it. Before I was transferred to Fox Lake in 1995, I worked for two years as a clerk in the library at the Green Bay prison. That institution housed 850 prisoners, but the library had a seating capacity for only 20. And like most prison libraries, it was open only on weekdays, with no

evening or weekend hours. The severe space limitations make it nearly impossible to get into the library, and many inmates gave up using it at all.

Being admitted to a prison library, however, is only half the problem: There's not much to read once you get there. At Green Bay, the collection consisted of 4,000 volumes (not counting law books). Less than a quarter were non-fiction, and the fiction stacks were mostly genre works by authors like Stephen King, Harold Robbins, Dean Koontz and Jackie Collins. The library didn't have a single book by Toni Morrison, Margaret Atwood, John Steinbeck, William Faulkner, Ralph Ellison, Richard Wright or other authors of substance.

Dismal as the collection in the Green Bay library was, the warden made sure it stayed that way. Several times during my stay there, community members offered to donate books to the library, but prison managers refused all such gifts. To top it off, the Green Bay library didn't offer interlibrary loan services, so inmates couldn't borrow books from other libraries.

Prisoners may purchase their own reading material, and many possess some personal books and magazines. Astonishingly, though, prison officials prohibit inmates from loaning books and magazines to one another. Prisoners who violate that rule risk disciplinary sanctions and having their books confiscated. Yet by quietly networking with others on his tier, a prisoner can access a diverse range of publications—a kind of alternative library.

The Wisconsin Department of Corrections also strictly limits the amount of reading material inmates may possess. As in many other states, prison rules here require that all of a prisoner's possessions fit in a footlocker measuring 32 inches by 16 inches by 16 inches. After packing in clothes, shoes, hygiene supplies and other accouterments of life, precious little space remains for reading material. As a final insult to intellect, television sets are exempted from the footlocker rule.

It's not completely impossible for a prisoner to read. Over the past 18 years, I have managed to educate myself. But I've had to fight prison authorities at every turn. Guards are forever saying I have too much reading material. And that's if I can get some light to read by. In December, administrators here at Fox Lake decided to ban all books and magazines about computers. They've confiscated my last five issues of *PC Computing*. The ban is a brazen First Amendment violation, and I plan to challenge it in a lawsuit—although two decades of such legal actions has led prison officials to brand me an incorrigible troublemaker and malcontent. Were I happy enough to spend all my time staring at a TV screen, I would be deemed a model prisoner.

Prison wardens claim they try to rehabilitate inmates. Indeed, at every prison where I've served time, a token number of inmates have been allowed to attend school or participate in drug counseling. But the dominant treatment program in American prisons, the one imposed every day, is TV therapy. ■

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Captive Audience

By Adrian Lomax

With the help of the state, prison inmates are becoming hard-core television addicts.

The G.I. Joe-looking prison guard scowls down at me from his perch on the elevated officers' platform. "I don't know what you want to read for," he says. "If I had one of those things at home, I'd be home watching it."

G.I. Joe is referring to the 45-inch TV mounted on the wall of the housing unit where I live, here at Wisconsin's Fox Lake Correctional Institution. Fox Lake is an open barracks with no individual cells, just 144 prisoners jammed on bunk-beds in one big room. After the sun sets, the barracks becomes too dark for reading. The building is equipped with sufficient lighting, but aside from a set of dim, yellow emergency bulbs, the guards usually keep the lights off. Arguing for reading light is a nightly chore.

It has always seemed odd to me that prison authorities would install expensive, big-screen TVs so that

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